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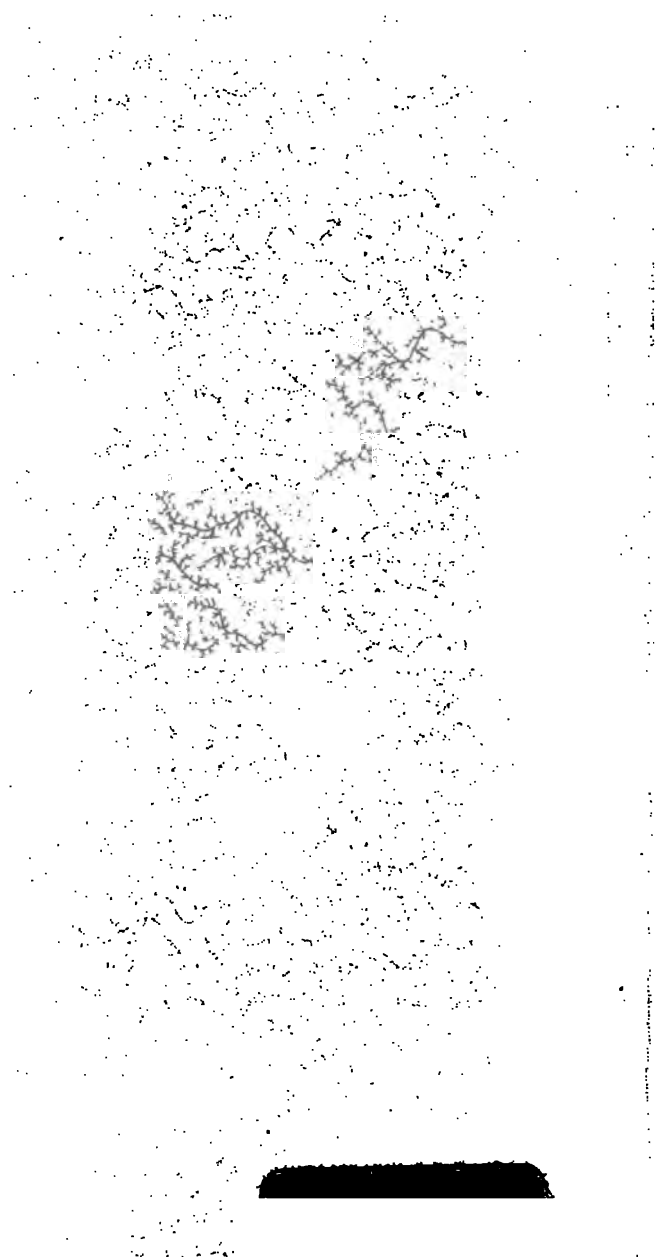
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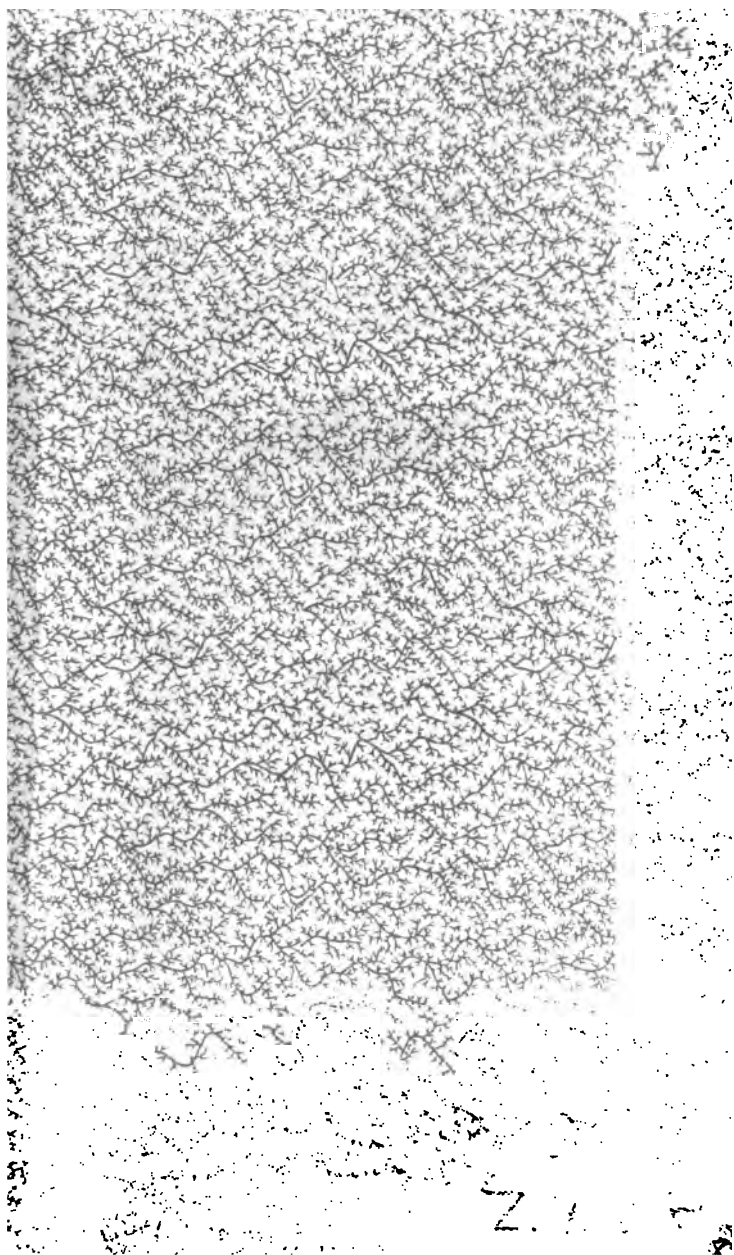
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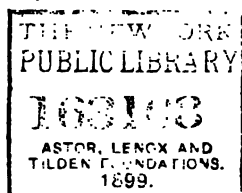
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in the Clerk's office of the District Court of the District of Massachusetts.

NOV 2 1893

CAMBRIDGE :
E. W. METCALF AND COMPANY,
Printers to the University.

TO
THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY,
TO WHICH IT HAS BEEN MY HAPPINESS
FOR MANY YEARS TO MINISTER,
THIS VOLUME
IS RESPECTFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
INSCRIBED.

W. E. C.

NEW YORK
PUBLISHED
1854

ERRATA.

Page 30, line 2, for we that, read that we
" 125, " 10, " iniquities, " fathers

NOV 1891
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MAY 1891

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DISCOURSE I.

ROMANS i. 16.

I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

PART I.

THESE words of Paul are worthy of his resolute and disinterested spirit. In uttering them he was not an echo of the multitude, a servile repeater of established doctrines. The vast majority around him were ashamed of Jesus. The cross was then coupled with infamy. Christ's name was scorned as a malefactor's, and to profess his religion was to share his disgrace. Since that time what striking changes have occurred! The cross now hangs as an ornament from the neck of beauty. It blazes on the flags of navies, and the standards of armies. Millions bow before it in adoration, as if it were a shrine of the divinity. Of course, the temptation to be ashamed of Jesus is very much diminished. Still it is not wholly removed. Much of the homage now paid to Christianity is outward, political, worldly, and paid to its corruptions much more than to its pure and lofty spirit; and accordingly its conscientious and intrepid friends must

not think it a strange thing to be encountered with occasional coldness or reproach. We may still be tempted to be ashamed of our religion, by being thrown among skeptics, who deny and deride it. We may be tempted to be ashamed of the simple and rational doctrines of Christ, by being brought into connexion with narrow zealots, who enforce their dark and perhaps degrading peculiarities as essential to salvation. We may be tempted to be ashamed of his pure, meek, and disinterested precepts, by being thrown among the licentious, self-seeking, and vindictive. Against these perils we should all go armed. To be loyal to truth and conscience under such trials is one of the signal proofs of virtue. No man deserves the name of Christian, but he who adheres to his principles amidst the unbelieving, the intolerant, and the depraved.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.” So said Paul. So would I say. Would to God that I could catch the spirit as well as the language of the Apostle, and bear my testimony to Christianity with the same heroic resolution. Do any ask why I join in this attestation to the gospel? Some of my reasons I propose now to set before you; and in doing so I ask the privilege of speaking, as the Apostle has done, in the first person; of speaking in my own name, and of laying open my own mind in the most direct language. There are cases, in which the ends of public discourse may be best answered by the frank expression of individual feeling; and this mode of address, when adopted with such views, ought not to be set down to the account of egotism.

I proceed to state the reasons why I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; and I begin with one so important, that it will occupy the present discourse.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, because it is *true*. This is my first reason. The religion is *true*, and no consideration but this could induce me to defend it. I adopt it, not because it is popular, for false and ruinous systems have enjoyed equal reputation; nor because it is thought to uphold the order of society, for I believe that nothing but truth can be permanently useful. It is *true*; and I say this not lightly, but after deliberate examination. I am not repeating the accents of the nursery. I do not affirm the truth of Christianity, because I was so taught before I could inquire, or because I was brought up in a community pledged to this belief. It is not unlikely, that my faith and zeal will be traced by some to these sources; and believing such imputations to be groundless, fidelity to the cause of truth binds me to repel them. The circumstance of having been born and educated under Christianity, so far from disposing me to implicit faith, has often been to me the occasion of serious distrust of our religion. On observing how common it is for men of all countries and names, whether Christians, Jews, or Mahometans, to receive the religion of their fathers, I have again and again asked myself, whether I too was not a slave, whether I too was not blindly walking in the path of tradition, and yielding myself as passively as others to an hereditary faith. I distrust and fear the power of numbers and of general opinion over my judgment; and few things incite me more to repel a doctrine than intolerant attempts to force it on my

understanding. Perhaps my Christian education and connexions have inclined me to skepticism, rather than bowed my mind to authority.

It may still be said, that the pride and prejudices and motives of interest, which belong to my profession as a Christian minister, throw a suspiciousness over my reasoning and judgment on the present subject. I reply, that to myself I seem as free from biases of this kind, as the most indifferent person. I have no priestly prepossessions. I know and acknowledge the corruptions and perversions of the ministerial office from the earliest age of the church. I reprobate the tyranny which it exercises so often over the human mind. I recognise no peculiar sanctity in those who sustain it. I think, then, that I come to the examination of Christianity with as few blinding partialities as any man. I indeed claim no exemption from error ; I ask no implicit faith in my conclusions ; I care not how jealously and thoroughly my arguments are sifted. I only ask, that I may not be prejudged as a servile or interested partisan of Christianity. I ask that I may be heard as a friend of truth, desirous to aid my fellow creatures in determining a question of great and universal concern. I appear as the advocate of Christianity, solely because it approves itself to my calmest reason as a revelation from God, and as the purest, brightest light which He has shed on the human mind. I disclaim all other motives. No policy, no vassalage to opinion, no dread of reproach even from the good, no private interest, no desire to uphold a useful superstition, nothing in short but a deliberate conviction *of the truth of Christianity*, induces me to appear in

its ranks. I should be ashamed of it, did I not believe it true.

In discussing this subject I shall express my convictions strongly ; I shall speak of infidelity as a gross and perilous error. But in so doing I beg not to be understood, as passing sentence on the character of individual unbelievers. I shall show that the Christian religion is true, is from God ; but I do not therefore conclude, that all who reject it are the enemies of God, and are to be loaded with reproach. I would uphold the truth without ministering to uncharitableness. The criminality, the damnable guilt of unbelief in all imaginable circumstances, is a position which I think untenable ; and persuaded as I am, that it prejudices the cause of Christianity, by creating an antipathy between its friends and opposers, which injures both, and drives the latter into more determined hostility to the truth, I think it worthy of a brief consideration in this stage of the discussion.

I lay it down as a principle, that unbelief, considered in itself, has no moral quality, is neither a virtue nor a vice, but must receive its character, whether good or bad, from the dispositions or motives, which produce or pervade it. Mere acts of the understanding are neither right nor wrong. When I speak of faith as a holy or virtuous principle, I extend the term beyond its primitive meaning, and include in it not merely the assent of the intellect, but the disposition or temper, by which this assent is determined, and which it is suited to confirm ; and I attach as broad a signification to *unbelief*, when I pronounce it a crime. The truth

is, that the human mind, though divided by our philosophy into many distinct capacities, seldom or never exerts them separately, but generally blends them in one act. Thus in forming a judgment, it exerts the will and affections, or the moral principles of our nature, as really as the power of thought. Men's passions and interests mix with, and are expressed in the decisions of the intellect. In the Scriptures, which use language freely, and not with philosophical strictness, faith and unbelief are mental acts of this complex character, or joint products of the understanding and heart ; and on this account alone, they are objects of approbation or reproof. In these views, I presume, reflecting Christians of every name agree.

According to these views, opinions cannot be laid down as unerring and immutable signs of virtue and vice. The very same opinion may be virtuous in one man and vicious in another, supposing it, as is very possible, to have originated in different states of mind. For example, if through envy and malignity I should rashly seize on the slightest proofs of guilt in my neighbour, my judgment of his criminality would be morally wrong. Let another man arrive at the same conclusion, in consequence of impartial inquiry and love of truth, and his decision would be morally right. Still more, according to these views, it is possible for the belief of Christianity to be as criminal as unbelief. Undoubtedly the reception of a system, so pure in spirit and tendency as the gospel, is to be regarded in general as a favorable sign. But let a man adopt *this* religion, because it will serve his interest and popularity ; let him shut his mind against objections


to it, lest they should shake his faith in a gainful system ; let him tamper with his intellect, and for base and selfish ends exhaust its strength in defence of the prevalent faith, and he is just as criminal in believing, as another would be in rejecting Christianity under the same bad impulses. Our religion is at this moment adopted, and passionately defended by vast multitudes, on the ground of the very same pride, worldliness, love of popularity, and blind devotion to hereditary prejudices, which led the Jews and Heathens to reject it in the primitive age ; and the faith of the first is as wanting in virtue, as was the infidelity of the last.

To judge of the character of faith and unbelief, we must examine the times and the circumstances in which they exist. At the first preaching of the gospel, to believe on Christ was a strong proof of an upright mind ; to enlist among his followers, was to forsake ease, honor, and worldly success ; to confess him was an act of signal loyalty to truth, virtue, and God. To believe in Christ at the present moment has no such significance. To confess him argues no moral courage. It may even betray a servility and worldliness of mind. These remarks apply in their spirit to unbelief. At different periods, and in different conditions of society, unbelief may express very different states of mind. Before we pronounce it a crime, and doom it to perdition, we ought to know the circumstances under which it has sprung up, and to inquire with candor whether they afford no palliation or defence. When Jesus Christ was on earth, when his miracles were wrought before men's eyes, when his voice sounded in their ears, when not a shade of doubt could be

thrown over the reality of his supernatural works, and not a human corruption had mingled with his doctrine, there was the strongest presumption against the uprightness and the love of truth of those who rejected him. He knew too the hearts and the lives of those who surrounded him, and saw distinctly in their envy, ambition, worldliness, sensuality, the springs of their unbelief; and accordingly he pronounced it a crime. Since that period, what changes have taken place! Jesus Christ has left the world. His miracles are events of a remote age, and the proofs of them, though abundant, are to many imperfectly unknown; and, what is incomparably more important, his religion has undergone corruption, adulteration, disastrous change, and its likeness to its founder is in no small degree effaced. The clear, consistent, quickening truth, which came from the lips of Jesus, has been exchanged for a hoarse jargon and vain babblings. The stream, so pure at the fountain, has been polluted and poisoned through its whole course. Not only has Christianity been overwhelmed by absurdities, but by impious doctrines, which have made the Universal Father, now a weak and vain despot, to be propitiated by forms and flatteries, and now an almighty torturer, foreordaining multitudes of his creatures to guilt, and then glorifying his justice by their everlasting woe. When I think what Christianity has become in the hands of politicians and priests, how it has been shaped into a weapon of power, how it has crushed the human soul for ages, how it has struck the intellect *with palsy* and haunted the imagination with *superstitious phantoms*, how it has broken whole nations to

the yoke, and frowned on every free thought ; when I think how, under almost every form of this religion, its ministers have taken it into their own keeping, have hewn and compressed it into the shape of rigid creeds, and have then pursued by menaces of everlasting woe whoever should question the divinity of these works of their hands ; when I consider, in a word, how, under such influences, Christianity has been and still is exhibited, in forms which shock alike the reason, conscience, and heart, I feel deeply, painfully, what a different system it is from that which Jesus taught, and I dare not apply to unbelief the terms of condemnation which belonged to the infidelity of the primitive age.

Perhaps I ought to go further. Perhaps I ought to say, that to reject Christianity under some of its corruptions is rather a virtue than a crime. At the present moment, I would ask, whether it is a vice to doubt the truth of Christianity, as it is manifested in Spain and Portugal. When a patriot in those benighted countries, who knows Christianity only as a bulwark of despotism, as a rearer of inquisitions, as a stern jailor immuring wretched woman in the convent, as an executioner stained and reeking with the blood of the friends of freedom ; I say, when the patriot, who sees in our religion the instrument of these crimes and woes, believes and affirms that it is not from God, are we authorized to charge his unbelief on dishonesty and corruption of mind, and to brand him as a culprit ? May it not be that the spirit of Christianity in his heart emboldens him to protest with his lips against *what bears the name* ? And if he thus protest, through



a deep sympathy with the oppression and sufferings of his race, is he not nearer the kingdom of God than the priest and inquisitor who boastingly and exclusively assume the Christian name? Jesus Christ has told us, that "this is the condemnation" of the unbelieving, "that they love darkness rather than light"; and who does not see, that this ground of condemnation is removed, just in proportion as the light is quenched, or Christian truth is buried in darkness and debasing error?

I know I shall be told that a man in the circumstances now supposed, would still be culpable for his unbelief, because the Scriptures are within his reach, and these are sufficient to guide him to the true doctrines of Christ. But in the countries of which I have spoken, the Scriptures are not common; and if they were, I apprehend that we should task human strength too severely, in requiring it, under every possible disadvantage, to gain the truth from this source alone. A man, born and brought up in the thickest darkness, and amidst the grossest corruptions of Christianity, accustomed to hear the Scriptures disparaged, accustomed to connect false ideas with their principal terms, and wanting our most common helps of criticism, can hardly be expected to detach from the mass of error which bears the name of the gospel, the simple principles of the primitive faith. Let us not exact too much of our fellow creatures. In our zeal for Christianity, let us not forget its spirit of equity and mercy. — In these remarks I have taken an extreme case. I have supposed a man subjected to the greatest disadvantages *in regard to the knowledge of Christianity*. But

obstacles less serious may exculpate the unbeliever. In truth, none of us can draw the line which separates between innocence and guilt in this particular. To measure the responsibility of a man, who doubts or denies Christianity, we must know the history of his mind, his capacity of judgment, the early influences and prejudices to which he was exposed, the forms under which the religion and its proofs first fixed his thoughts, and the opportunities since enjoyed of eradicating errors, which struck root before the power of trying them was unfolded. We are not his judges. At another and an unerring tribunal he must give account.

I cannot then join in the common cry against infidelity as the sure mark of a corrupt mind. That unbelief often has its origin in evil dispositions I cannot doubt. The character of the unbeliever often forces us to acknowledge, that he rejects Christianity to escape its rebukes; that its purity is its chief offence; that he seeks infidelity as a refuge from fear and virtuous restraint. But to impute these unholy motives to a man of pure life, is to judge rashly, and it may be unrighteously. I cannot look upon unbelief as essentially and unfailingly a crime. But I do look upon it as among the greatest of calamities. It is the loss of the chief aid of virtue, of the mightiest power over temptation, of the most quickening knowledge of God, of the only unfailing light, of the only sure hope. The unbeliever would gain unspeakably by parting with every possession for the truth which he doubts or rejects. And how shall we win him to the faith? Not by reproach, by scorn, by tones of

superiority ; but by paying due respect to his understanding, his virtues, and his right of private judgment ; by setting before him Christianity in its simple majesty, its reasonableness, and wonderful adaptation to the wants of our spiritual nature ; by exhibiting its proofs without exaggeration, yet in their full strength ; and, above all, by showing in our own characters and lives, that there is in Christianity a power to purify, elevate, and console, which can be found in no human teaching. These are the true instruments of conversion. The ignorant and superstitious may indeed be driven into a religion by menace and reproach. But the reflecting unbeliever cannot but distrust a cause which admits such weapons. He must be reasoned with as a man, an equal, and a brother. Perhaps we may silence him for a time, by spreading through the community a fanatical excitement, and a persecuting hatred of infidelity. But as by such processes Christianity would be made to take a more unlovely and irrational form, its secret foes would be multiplied ; its brightest evidence would be dimmed, its foundation sapped, its energy impaired ; and whenever the time should arrive for throwing off the mask (and that time would come), we should learn, that in the very ranks of its nominal disciples, there had been trained a host of foes, who would burn to prostrate the intolerant faith, which had so long sealed their lips, and trampled on the rights and freedom of the human mind.

According to these views, I do not condemn the unbeliever, unless he bear witness against himself by an immoral and irreligious life. It is not given me to *search his heart*. But this power is given to himself,

and as a friend, I call upon him to exert it ; I ask him to look honestly into his own mind, to question his past life, and to pronounce impartial sentence on the causes of his unbelief. Let him ask himself, whether he has inquired into the principles and proofs of Christianity deliberately and in the love of truth ; whether the desire to discover and fulfill his duties to God and his fellow creatures has governed his examination ; whether he has surrendered himself to no passions or pursuits which religion and conscience rebuke, and which bar the mind and sear the heart against the truth. If, thus self-questioned, his heart acquit him, let no man condemn him, and let him heed no man's condemnation. But if conscience bear witness against him, he has cause to suspect and dread his unbelief. He has reason to fear, that it is the fruit of a depraved mind, and that it will ripen and confirm the depravity from which it sprung.

I know that there are those, who will construe what they will call my lenity towards unbelief, into treachery towards Christianity. There are those who think, that unless skepticism be ranked among the worst crimes, and the infidel be marked out for abhorrence and dread, the multitude of men will lose their hold on the gospel. An opinion more discreditable to Christianity cannot easily be advanced by its friends. It virtually admits, that the proofs of our religion, unless examined under the influence of terror, cannot work conviction ; that the gospel cannot be left, like other subjects, to the calm and unbiassed judgment of mankind. It discovers a distrust of Christianity, with *which I have no sympathy.* And here I would re-

mark, that the worst abuses of our religion have sprung from this cowardly want of confidence in its power. Its friends have feared, that it could not stand without a variety of artificial buttresses. They have imagined, that men must now be bribed into faith by annexing to it temporal privileges, now driven into it by menaces and inquisitions, now attracted by gorgeous forms, now awed by mysteries and superstitions; in a word, that the multitude must be imposed upon, or the religion will fall. I have no such distrust of Christianity; I believe in its invincible powers. It is founded in our nature. It meets our deepest wants. Its proofs as well as principles are adapted to the common understandings of men, and need not to be aided by appeals to fear or any other passion, which would discourage inquiry or disturb the judgment. I fear nothing for Christianity, if left to speak in its own tones, to approach men with its unveiled, benignant countenance. I do fear much from the weapons of policy and intimidation, which are framed to uphold the imagined weakness of Christian truth.

I now come to the great object of this discourse, — an exhibition of the proofs of Christianity; — and I begin with a topic which is needed to prepare some, if not many, to estimate these proofs fairly, and according to their true weight. I begin with the position, That there is nothing in the general idea of Revelation at which Reason ought to take offence, nothing inconsistent with any established truth, or with our best views of God and Nature. This topic meets a prejudice not very rare. I repeat it then, Revelation is nothing incred-

ible, nothing which carries contradiction on its face, nothing at war with any great principles of reason or experience. On hearing of God's teaching us by some other means than the fixed order of nature, we ought not to be surprised, nor ought the suggestion to awaken resistance in our minds.

Revelation is not at war with nature. From the necessity of the case, the earliest instruction must have come to human beings from this source. If our race had a beginning (and nothing but the insanity of Atheism can doubt this), then its first members, created as they were without human parentage, and having no resource in the experience of fellow creatures who had preceded them, required an immediate teaching from their Creator; they would have perished without it. Revelation, was the very commencement of human history, the foundation of all later knowledge and improvement. It was an essential part of the course of Providence, and must not then be regarded as a discord in God's general system.

Revelation is not at war with nature. Nature prompts us to expect it from the relation which God bears to the human race. The relation of Creator is the most intimate which can subsist; and it leads us to anticipate a free and affectionate intercourse with the creature. That the Universal Father should be bound by a parental interest to his offspring, that he should watch over and assist the progress of beings whom he has enriched with the divine gifts of reason and conscience, is so natural a doctrine, so accordant with his character, that various sects, both philosophical and religious, both anterior and subsequent to

Christianity, have believed, not only in general revelation, but that God reveals himself to every human soul. When I think of the vast capacities of the human mind, of God's nearness to it, and unbounded love towards it, I am disposed to wonder, not that revelations have been made, but that they have not been more variously vouchsafed to the wants of mankind.


Revelation has a striking agreement with the chief method, which God has instituted for carrying forward individuals and the race, and is thus in harmony with his ordinary operations. Whence is it, that we all acquire our chief knowledge? Not from the outward universe; not from the fixed laws of material nature; but from intelligent beings, more advanced than ourselves. The teachings of the wise and good are our chief aids. Were our connexion with superior minds broken off, had we no teacher but nature with its fixed laws, its unvarying revolutions of night and day and seasons, we should remain for ever in the ignorance of childhood. Nature is a volume, which we can read only by the help of an intelligent interpreter. The great law under which man is placed, is, that he shall receive illumination and impulse from beings more improved than himself. Now revelation is only an extension of this universal method of carrying forward mankind. In this case, God takes on himself the office to which all rational beings are called. He becomes an immediate teacher to a few, communicating to them a higher order of truths than *had before* been attained, which they in turn are to *teach to their race*. Here is no new power or element

introduced into the system, but simply an enlargement of that agency on which the progress of man chiefly depends.

Let me next ask you to consider, Why or for what end God has ordained, as the chief means of human improvement, the communication of light from superior to inferior minds ; and if it shall then appear, that revelation is strikingly adapted to promote a similar though more important end, you will have another mark of agreement between revelation and his ordinary Providence. Why is it that God has made men's progress dependent on instruction from their fellow beings ? Why are the more advanced commissioned to teach the less informed ? A great purpose, I believe the chief purpose, is, to establish interesting relations among men, to bind them to one another by generous sentiments, to promote affectionate intercourse, to call forth a purer love than could spring from a communication of mere outward gifts. Now it is rational to believe, that the Creator designs to bind his creatures to Himself as truly as to one another, and to awaken towards himself even stronger gratitude, confidence, and love ; for these sentiments towards God are more happy and ennobling than towards any other being ; and it is plain that revelation, or immediate divine teaching, serves as effectually to establish these ties between God and man, as human teaching to attach men to one another. We see then in revelation an end corresponding to what the Supreme Being adopts in his common providence. That the end here affirmed is worthy of his interposition, who can doubt ? His *benevolence* can propose no higher purpose, than that

of raising the minds and hearts of his creatures to himself. His parental character is a pledge, that he must intend this ineffable happiness for his rational offspring ; and Revelation is suited to this end, not only by unfolding new doctrines in relation to God, but by the touching proof which it carries in itself of the special interest which he takes in his human family. There is plainly an expression of deeper concern, a more affectionate character, in this mode of instruction, than in teaching us by the fixed order of nature. Revelation is God speaking to us in our own language, in the accents which human friendship employs. It shows a love, breaking through the reserve and distance, which we all feel to belong to the method of teaching us by his works alone. It fastens our minds on him. We can look on nature, and not think of the Being whose glory it declares ; but God is indissolubly connected with, and indeed is a part of the idea of revelation. How much nearer does this direct intercourse bring him to the mass of mankind ! On this account revelation would seem to me important, were it simply to repeat the teachings of nature. This reiteration of great truths in a less formal style, in kinder, more familiar tones, is peculiarly fitted to awaken the soul to the presence and benignity of its heavenly Parent. I see then in revelation a purpose corresponding with that for which human teaching was instituted. Both are designed to bring together the teacher and the taught in pure affections.

Let me next ask you to consider, what is the kind of instruction which the higher minds among men are *chiefly called to impart* to the inferior. You will here



see another agreement between revelation and that ordinary human teaching, which is the great instrument of improving the race. What kind of instruction is it, which parents, which the aged and experienced, are most anxious to give to the young, and on which the safety of this class mainly depends? It is instruction in relation to the Future, to their adult years, such as is suited to prepare them for the life that is opening before them. It is God's will, when he gives us birth, that we should be forewarned of the future stages of our being, of approaching manhood or womanhood, of the scenes, duties, labors, through which we are to pass; and for this end he connects us with beings, who have traversed the paths on which we are entering, and whose duty it is to train us for a more advanced age. Instruction in regard to Futurity is the great means of improvement. Now the Christian revelation has for its aim to teach us on this very subject; to disclose the life which is before us, and to fit us for it. A Future state is its constant burden. That God should give us light in regard to that state, if he design us for it, is what we should expect from his solicitude to teach us in regard to what is future in our earthly existence. Nature thirsts for, and analogy almost promises, some illumination on the subject of human destiny. This topic I shall insist on more largely hereafter. I wish now simply to show you the agreement of revelation, in this particular, with the ordinary providence of God.

I proceed to another order of reflections, which to my own mind is particularly suited to meet the *vague idea, that revelation is at war with nature.* To

*Judge of nature, we should look at its highest ranks of beings. We should inquire of the human Soul, which we all feel to be a higher existence than matter. Now I maintain, that there are in the human soul wants, deep wants, which are not met by the influences and teachings, which the ordinary course of things affords. I am aware that this is a topic to provoke distrust, if not derision, in the low-minded and sensual ; but I speak what I do know ; and nothing moves me so little as the scoffs of men who despise their own nature. One of the most striking views of human nature, is the disproportion between what it conceives and thirsts for, and what it finds or can secure in the range of the present state. It is prone to stretch beyond its present bounds. Ideas of excellence and happiness spring up, which it cannot realize now. It carries within itself a standard, of which it daily and hourly falls short. This self-contradiction is the source of many sharp pains. There is, in most men, a dim consciousness, at least, of being made for something higher than they have gained, a feeling of internal discord, a want of some stable good, a disappointment in merely outward acquisitions ; and in proportion as these convictions and wants become distinct, they break out in desires of illumination and aids from God not found in nature. I am aware, that the wants of which I have spoken are but faintly developed in the majority of men. Accustomed to give their thoughts and strength to the outward world, multitudes do not penetrate and cannot interpret their own souls. They impute to outward causes the miseries which spring from an *internal fountain*. They do not detain, and are scarce-

ly conscious of the better thoughts and feelings, which sometimes dart through their minds. Still there are few, who are not sometimes dissatisfied with themselves, who do not feel the wrong which they have done to themselves, and who do not desire a purer and nobler state of mind. The suddenness, with which the multitude are thrilled by the voice of fervent eloquence, when it speaks to them of the spiritual world in tones of reality, shows the deep wants of human nature even amidst ignorance and degradation. But all men do not give themselves wholly to outward things. There are those, and not a few, who are more true to their nature, and ought therefore to be regarded as its more faithful representatives; and in such, the wants, of which I have spoken, are unfolded with energy. There are those, who feel painfully the weight of their present imperfection; who are fired by rare examples of magnanimity and devotion; who desire nothing so intensely as power over temptation, as elevation above selfish passions, as conformity of will to the inward law of duty, as the peace of conscious rectitude and religious trust; who would rejoice to lay down the present life for that spotless, bright, disinterested virtue, of which they have the type or germ in their own minds. Such men can find no resource but in God, and are prepared to welcome a revelation of his merciful purposes as an unspeakable gift. I say then that the human mind has wants which nature does not answer. And these are not accidental feelings, unaccountable caprices, but are deep, enduring, and reproduced in all ages under one or another form. They breathe through the works

of genius ; they burn in the loftiest souls. Here are principles implanted by God in the highest order of his creatures on earth, to which revelation is adapted, and I say then that revelation is any thing but hostility to nature.

I will offer but one more view in illustration of this topic. I ask you to consider, on what Principle of human nature the Christian revelation is intended to bear and to exert influence, and then to inquire whether the peculiar importance of this principle be not a foundation for peculiar interposition in its behalf. If so, revelation may be said to be a demand of the human soul, and its imagined incongruity with nature will disappear. For what principle or faculty of the mind then was Christianity intended ? It was plainly not given to enrich the intellect by teaching philosophy, or to perfect the imagination and taste by furnishing sublime and beautiful models of composition. It was not meant to give sagacity in public life, or skill and invention in common affairs. It was undoubtedly designed to develope all these faculties, but secondarily, and through its influence on a higher principle. It addresses itself primarily, and is especially adapted, to the Moral power in man. It regards and is designed for man as a moral being, endowed with conscience or the principle of duty, who is capable of that peculiar form of excellence which we call righteousness or virtue, and exposed to that peculiar evil, guilt. Now the question offers itself, Why does God employ such extraordinary means for promoting virtue rather than science, for aiding *conscience rather than intellect* and our other powers ?

Is there a foundation in the moral principle for peculiar interpositions in its behalf? I affirm, that there is. I affirm, that a broad distinction exists between our moral nature and our other capacities. Conscience is the Supreme power within us. Its essence, its grand characteristic, is Sovereignty. It speaks with a divine authority. Its office is to command, to rebuke, to reward; and happiness and honor depend on the reverence with which we listen to it. All our other powers become useless and worse than useless, unless controlled by the principle of duty. Virtue is the supreme good, the supreme beauty, the divinest of God's gifts, the health and harmonious unfolding of the soul, and the germ of immortality. It is worth every sacrifice, and has power to transmute sacrifices and sufferings into crowns of glory and rejoicing. Sin, vice, is an evil of its own kind, and not to be confounded with any other. Who does not feel at once the broad distinction between misfortune and crime, between disease of body and turpitude of soul? Sin, vice, is war with the highest power in our own breasts, and in the universe. It makes a being odious to himself, and arms against him the principle of rectitude in God and in all pure beings. It poisons or dries up the fountains of enjoyment, and adds unspeakable weight to the necessary pains of life. It is not a foreign evil, but a blight and curse in the very centre of our being. Its natural associates are fear, shame, and self-torture; and whilst it robs the present of consolation, it leaves the future without hope. Now I say, that in this peculiar ruin wrought *by moral evil, and in this peculiar worth of moral*

goodness, we see reasons for special interpositions of God in behalf of virtue, in resistance of sin. It becomes the Infinite Father to manifest peculiar interest in the moral condition and wants of his creatures. Their great and continued corruption is an occasion for peculiar methods of relief; and a revelation given to restore them, and carry them forward to perfection, has an end which justifies, if it does not demand, this signal expression of parental love.

The preceding views have been offered, not as sufficient to prove that a revelation has been given, but for the purpose of removing the vague notion that it is at war with nature, and of showing its consistency with the spirit and principles of the divine administration. I proceed now to consider the direct and positive proofs of Christianity, beginning with some remarks on the nature and sufficiency of the evidence on which it chiefly relies.

Christianity sprung up about eighteen hundred years ago. Of course its evidences are to be sought in history. We must go back to the time of its birth, and understand the condition in which it found the world, as well as the circumstances of its origin, progress, and establishment; and happily, on these points, we have all the light necessary to a just judgment. We must not imagine, that a religion, which bears the date of so distant an age, must therefore be involved in obscurity. We know enough of the earliest times of Christianity to place the question of its truth within our reach. The past may be known as truly as the present; and I deem this principle so important that I ask your attention to it.

The past, I have said, may be known ; nor is this all ; we derive from it our most important knowledge. Former times are our chief instructors. Our political, as well as religious institutions, our laws, customs, modes of thinking, arts of life, have come down from earlier ages, and most of them are unintelligible without a light borrowed from history.

Not only are we able to know the nearest of past ages, or those which touch on our own times, but those which are remote. No educated man doubts any more of the victories of Alexander or Cæsar, before Christ, than of Napoleon's conquests in our own day. So open is our communication with some ages of antiquity, so many are the records which they have transmitted, that we know them even better than nearer times ; and a religion which grew up eighteen hundred years ago, may be more intelligible and accompanied with more decisive proofs of truth or falsehood, than one which is not separated from us by a fourth part of that duration.

From the nature of things, we may and must know much of the past ; for the present has grown out of the past, is its legacy, fruit, representative, and is deeply impressed with it. Events do not expire at the moment of their occurrence. Nothing takes place without leaving traces behind it ; and these are in many cases so distinct and various, as to leave not a doubt of their cause. We all understand, how, in the material world, events testify of themselves to future ages. Should we visit an unknown region, and behold masses of lava covered with soil of different degrees of thickness, and surrounding a blackened crater, we

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try of its birth. Its Jewish origin is not only testified by all history, but is stamped on its front and woven into its frame. The language, in which it is conveyed, carries us at once to Judea. Its name is derived from Jewish prophecy. None but Jews could have written the New Testament. So natural, undesigned, and perpetual are the references and allusions of the writers to the opinions and manners of that people, so accustomed are they to borrow from the same source the metaphors, similitudes, types, by which they illustrate their doctrines, that Christianity, as to its outward form, may be said to be steeped in Judaism. We have then another established fact. We know where it was born.

3. Again, we know the individual by whom Christianity was founded. We know its Author, and from the nature of the case this fact cannot but be known. The founder of a religion is naturally and necessarily the object of general inquiry. Wherever the new faith is carried, the first and most eager questions are, "From whom does it come? On whose authority does it rest?" Curiosity is never more intense, than in regard to the individual, who claims a divine commission and sends forth a new religion. He is the last man to be overlooked or mistaken. In the case of Christianity especially, its founder may be said to have been forced on men's notice, for his history forms an essential part of his religion. Christianity is not an abstract doctrine, which keeps its author out of sight. He is its very soul. It rests on him, and finds its best illustration in his life. These reflections *however may be spared*. The simple consideration, that

Christianity must have had an author, and that it has been always ascribed to Jesus and to no one else, places the great fact, which I would establish, beyond doubt.

4. I next observe that we not only know the founder of Christianity, but the Ministers by whom he published and spread it through the world. A new religion must have propagators, first teachers, and with these it must become intimately associated. A community can no more be ignorant as to the teachers who converted it to a new faith, than as to the conqueror who subjected it to a new government; and where the art of writing is known and used for recording events, the latter fact will not more certainly be transmitted to posterity than the former. We have the testimony of all ages, that the men called Apostles were the first propagators of Christianity, nor have any others been named as sustaining this office; and it is impossible that, on such a point, such testimony should be false.

5. Again; we know not only when, and where, and by whom Christianity was introduced;—we know, from a great variety of sources, what in the main this religion was, as it came from the hands of its founder. To assure ourselves on this point, we need not recur to any sacred books. From the age following that of Christ and the Apostles, down to the present day, we have a series, and an almost numberless host, of writers on the subject of Christianity; and whilst we discover in them a great diversity of opinions, and opposite interpretations of *some of Christ's teachings*, yet on the whole they so

far agree in the great facts of his history, and in certain great principles of his religion, we (that) cannot mistake as to the general character of the system which he taught. There is not a shadow of reason for the opinion that the original system which Jesus taught was lost, and a new one substituted and fastened on the world in his name. The many and great corruptions of Christianity did not and could not hide its principal features. The greatest corruptions took place in the century which followed the death of the Apostles, when certain wild and visionary sects endeavoured to establish a union between the new religion and the false philosophy to which they had been wedded in their heathen state. You may judge of their character and claims, when I tell you, that they generally agreed in believing, that the God who made the world, and who was worshipped by the Jews, was not the supreme God, but an inferior and imperfect Deity, and that matter had existed from eternity, and was essentially and unchangeably evil. Yet these sects endeavoured to sustain themselves on the writings which the great body of Christians received and honored as the works of the Apostles; and, amidst their delusions, they recognised and taught the miracles of Christ, his resurrection, and the most important principles of his religion; so that the general nature of Christianity, as it came from its Founder, may be ascertained beyond a doubt. Here another great point is fixed.

6. I have now stated to you several particulars relating to Christianity, which admit no doubt; and *these indisputable facts* are of great weight in a discus-


sion of the Christian evidences. There is one point more, of importance, which cannot be settled so expeditiously as these. I hope, however, enough may be said to place it beyond doubt, without exceeding the limits of a discourse ; and I invite to it your serious attention. I say, then, that we not only know in general what Christianity was at its first promulgation ; but we know precisely what its first propagators taught, for we have their writings. We have their religion under their own hands. We have particularly four narratives of the life, works, and words of their Master, which put us in possession of his most private as well public teaching. It is true, that without those writings we should still have strong arguments for the truth of Christianity ; but we should be left in doubt as to some of its important principles ; and its internal evidence, which corroborates, and, as some think, exceeds the external, would be very much impaired. The possession of the writings of the first propagators of the gospel must plainly render us great aid in judging of its claims. These writings, I say, we have, and this point I would now establish.

I am aware that the question, to which I now ask your attention, is generally confined to professed students. But it is one on which men of good sense are competent to judge, and its great importance gives it a claim to the serious consideration of every Christian.

The question is, whether the four Gospels are genuine, that is, whether they were written by those to whom they are ascribed. To answer it, let us consider how we determine the genuineness of books in general. I begin with the obvious remark, that to


know the author of a work, it is not necessary that we should be eye-witnesses of its composition. Perhaps of the numberless publications of the present day, we have not seen one growing under the pen of the writer. By far the greater number come to us across the ocean, and yet we are as confident in regard to their authors as if we had actually seen them first committed to paper. The ascription of a book to an individual, during his life, by those who are interested in him, and who have the best means of knowing the truth, removes all doubts as to its author. A strong and wide-spread conviction of this kind must have a cause, and can only be explained by the actual production of the work by the reputed writer. It should here be remembered that there is a strong disposition in men to ascertain the author of an important and interesting work. We have had a remarkable illustration of this in our own times. The author of *Waverley* saw fit to wrap himself for a time in mystery ; and what was the consequence ? No subject in politics or science was agitated more generally than the question to whom the work belonged. It was not only made a topic in almost every periodical publication, but one book was expressly written to solve the problem. The instance, I know, was remarkable ; but this inquisitiveness in regard to books is a principle of our nature, and is particularly active, when the book in debate is a work of singular authority.

I have spoken of the confidence which we feel as to the authors of books published in our own times. But our certainty is not confined to these. Every *reading man* is as sure that Hume and Robertson wrote




the histories which bear their names, as that Scott has in our own times sent out the *Life of Bonaparte*. Those eminent men were born more than a hundred years ago, and they died before the birth of most to whom I speak. But the communication between their times and our own is so open and various, that we know their literary labors as well as those of the present day. Not a few persons now living have had intercourse with some of the contemporaries of these historians ; and through this channel in particular, we of this generation have the freest access to the preceding, and know its convictions in regard to the authors of interesting books as fully as if we had lived in it ourselves. That the next age will have the same communication with the present, as the present has with the past, and that these convictions of our predecessors will be transmitted by us to our immediate successors, you will easily comprehend ; and you will thus learn the respect which is due to the testimony of the third generation on such a subject.

In what has now been said, we see with what confidence and certainty we determine the authors of writings published in our own age or in the times nearest our own. These remarks may be easily applied to the productions of antiquity. When the question arises, whether an ancient book was written by the individual whose name it bears, we must inquire into the opinion of his contemporaries, or of those who succeeded his contemporaries so nearly as to have intimate communication with them. The competency of these to a just judgment on the subject, we have *seen ; and if they have transmitted their convictions to*



us in undisputed writings, it ought to be decisive. On this testimony, we ascribe many ancient books to their authors with the firmest faith; and, in truth, we receive as genuine many works of antiquity on far inferior proofs. There are many books of which no notice can be found for several ages after the time of their reputed authors. Still the fact, that, as soon as they are named, they are ascribed undoubtingly, and by general consent, to certain authors, is esteemed a sufficient reason for regarding them as their productions, unless some opposite proof can be adduced. This general reception of a work as having come from a particular writer, is an effect which requires a cause; and the most natural and obvious explanation of his being named rather than any other man, is, that he actually composed it.

I now proceed to apply these principles to the four histories of Christ, commonly called Gospels. The question is, what testimony respecting their authors has come down to us from the age of their reputed authors, or from times so near it and so connected with it, as to be faithful representatives of its convictions. By this testimony, as we have seen, the genuineness of the books must be decided. And I begin with admitting that no evidence on the subject is to be derived from contemporary writers. No author, living in the age of the first propagators of Christianity, has named the Gospels. The truth is, that no undisputed writings of their immediate converts have been preserved. A few tracts, bearing the name of men acquainted with the Apostles have indeed come down to us; but so much *uncertainty hangs* over their origin, that I am unwilling to



ground on them any reasoning. Nor ought we to wonder that the works of private Christians of the primitive age are wanting to us ; for that was an age of persecution, when men were called to *die* rather than *write* for their religion. I suppose too, that during the times of the Apostles, little importance was attached to any books but such as were published or authorized by these eminent men ; and, of course, what was written by others was little circulated, and soon passed away.

The undisputed writings of the early Christians begin about seventy years after the times of the Apostles. At that period there probably remained none of the first converts or contemporaries of the Apostles. But there were living not a few, who had been acquainted with the last survivors of that honored generation. When the Apostles died, they must have left behind a multitude who had known them ; and of these not a few must have continued many years, and must have had intercourse with the new generation which sprung up after the apostolic age. Now in the times of this generation, the series of Christian authors begins. Although, then, we have no productions of the apostolic age to bear witness to the Gospels, we have writings from the ages which immediately followed it, and which, from their connexion with it, ought, as we have seen, to be regarded, as most credible witnesses on such a subject. What then do these writings teach ? I answer, Their testimony is clear and full. We learn from them, not only, that the Gospels existed in those times, but that they were widely *diffused*, that they were received as the wri-

tings of the men whose names they bear, and that they were regarded with a confidence and veneration yielded to no other books. They are quoted as books given by their revered authors to the Christian community, to be public and enduring records of the religion; and they are spoken of as read in the assemblies which were held for the inculcation and extension of the faith. I ask you to weigh this testimony. It comes to us from times connected intimately with the first age. Had the Gospels been invented and first circulated among the generation which succeeded the Apostles, could that generation have received them, as books known and honored before their time, and as the most authoritative and precious records transmitted to them from their fathers and predecessors? The case may seem too plain to require explanation; but as many are unaccustomed to inquiries of this kind, I will offer an example. You well know that nearly a century ago a great religious excitement was spread through this country chiefly by the ministry of Whitefield. Suppose now that four books were at this moment to come forth, bearing the names of four of the most distinguished men of that period, of Whitefield, of the venerable Edwards, and of two others intimately associated with them in their religious labors; and suppose these books not only to furnish narratives of what then took place, but to contain principles and rules urged with all possible earnestness and authority on the disciples or admirers of these religious leaders. Do you think it possible that their followers of the present day, and the public, could *be made to believe*, that these books had been pub-

lished by their pretended authors, had been given as standards to a religious community, and had been handed down as venerated books, when no such works had been heard of before. This is but a faint illustration; for Whitefield and Edwards are names of little weight or authority, compared with what the Apostles possessed in the primitive church.

We have, then, strong and sufficient reasons for believing that the histories called Gospels were received, in the times of the Apostles, as works of those whose names they bear; and were handed down as theirs with veneration by their contemporaries. Will any say that all this may be true, but that, during the lives of the Apostles, books forged in their names may have obtained general currency? To this extravagant supposition it would be sufficient to reply, according to my previous remarks, that the general ascription of a book to an author during his life is the ground on which the genuineness of the most unquestioned works depends. But I would add, that this evidence is singularly conclusive in the present case. The original propagators of Christianity, to whom the Gospels were ascribed, were, from their office, among the public men of their age. They must have travelled extensively. They must have been consulted by inhabitants of various countries on the subject of the new religion. They must have been objects of deep interest to the first converts. They lived in the world's eye. Their movements, visits, actions, words, and writings must have awakened attention. Books from their hands must have produced a great sensation. We cannot conceive a harder task, than to impose writings,

forged in their name, on Christians and Christian communities, thus intimately connected with them, and so alive to their efforts for the general cause. The opportunities of detecting the falsehood were abundant; and to imagine falsehood to prosper under such circumstances argues a strange ignorance of literary history and of human nature.

Let me add, that the motives of the first Christians, to ascertain distinctly whether writings ascribed to the Apostles were truly theirs, were the strongest which can be conceived. I have mentioned, in my previous remarks, the solicitude of the world to learn the author of *Waverley*. The motive was mere curiosity; and yet to what earnest inquiries were multitudes impelled. The name of the author was of little or no moment. The book was the same, its portraits equally vivid, its developements of the human heart equally true and powerful, whether the author were known or not. So it is with most works. Books of science, philosophy, morals, and polite literature owe their importance and authority, not to their writers, but to their contents. Now the four Gospels were different in this respect. They were not the same to the first converts, come from whom they might. If written by Apostles or by their associates, they had an authority and sacredness, which could belong to them on no other condition. They became books of laws to the Christian community, became binding on their consciences and lives. To suppose such books received blindly and without inquiry by great numbers, who had all the means of ascertaining their true origin, is to suppose *the first converts* insane or idiots, a charge, which I

believe their worst enemies will not think of urging against them, and which the vast superiority of their religious and moral system to all the philosophical systems of the times abundantly disproves.

I have now finished what is called the historical or external evidence of the genuineness of the four Gospels ; that is, the evidence drawn from their being received and revered as the writings of the Apostles in the first and succeeding ages of Christianity. But before leaving this head, I would notice a difficulty which may press on some minds. I suppose, that many of you have heard, that very early, probably about the beginning of the second century, writings were forged in the name of the Apostles ; and some may ask why the four Gospels may not belong to this description. The answer is, that the Gospels, as we have seen, were received and honored by the great body of Christians, in the first and succeeding ages of Christianity, as writings of Apostles or their associates. The forgeries are known to be forgeries, because they were not so received, because they were held in no veneration, but were rejected as fictitious by the Christian community. Here is a broad line of distinction. It must not surprise us, that in the great excitement produced by the first publication and triumphs of Christianity, a variety of extravagant notions should spring up, and that attempts should be made to blend the new religion with established systems : and as the names of the first propagators of the Gospel were held in peculiar reverence, we cannot wonder that the leaders of sects *should strive to attach an apostolic sanction to their*

opinions, by sending abroad partly true and partly false accounts of the preaching of these eminent men. Whether these writings were sent forth as compositions of the Apostles, or only as records of their teaching, made by their hearers, is a question open to debate ; but as to their origin there can be little doubt. We can account for their existence, and for the degree of favor which they obtained. They were generally written to give authority to the dreams or speculations of some extravagant sects, to which they were very much confined, and with which most of them passed away. There is not a shadow of reason for confounding with these our Gospels, which were spread from the beginning through the Christian world, and were honored and transmitted as the works of the venerated men by whose names they were called.

Having now given the historical argument in favor of the genuineness of the Gospels, that is, in favor of their being written by their reputed authors, I now add, that there are several presumptive and internal proofs of the same truth, which, taken alone, have great weight, and, when connected with the preceding, form an amount of evidence not easily withstood. I have time to glance at only a few of these.

It is a presumption in favor of the claims of an author, that the book ascribed to him has never been assigned to any other individual. Now I am not aware, that unbelief has in any age named any individuals, to whom the Gospels may be traced rather than to those whose names they bear. We are not called upon to choose between different writers. In common cases *this absence of rival claims* is considered as decisive

in favor of the reputed author, unless the books themselves give ground to suspect another hand. Why shall not this principle be applied to the Gospels as well as to all other works?

Another presumption in favor of the belief that these histories were written by the first propagators of Christianity, arises from the consideration, that such books were to be expected from them. It is hardly conceivable that the Apostles, whose zeal carried abroad their system through so many nations, and who lived in an age of reading and writing, should leave their doctrines to tradition, should neglect the ordinary precaution of embodying them in the only permanent form, the only one in which they could be accurately transmitted, and by which all other systems were preserved. It is reasonable to suppose that they wrote what they taught; and if so, it is hardly possible that their writings should be lost. Their accounts must have been received and treasured up just as we know the Gospels were cherished; and hence arises a strong presumption in favor of the genuineness of these books.

Again; these books carry one strong mark of having been written in the time of the Apostles. They contain no traces of later times, nothing to indicate that the authors belonged to another age. Now to those of you, who are acquainted with such subjects, it is hardly necessary to observe, how difficult it is for a writer to avoid betraying the period in which he lives; and the cause is very obvious. Every age has its peculiarities, has manners, events, feelings, words, *phrases of its own*; and a man brought up among these

falls so naturally under their influence, and incorporates them so fully with his own mind, that they break out and manifest themselves, almost necessarily and without his consciousness, in his words and writings. The present makes an impression incomparably more vivid than the past, and accordingly traces of the real age of a writer may almost always be discovered by a critical eye, however anxious he may be to assume the style and character of a preceding age. Now the Gospels betray no marks of the feelings, manners, contentions, events of a period later than that in which the Apostles lived ; and when we consider, that, with the exception of Luke's history, they have all the appearance of having come from plain men, unused to composition, this argument applies to them with peculiar force. Under this head, I might place before you the evidence of the genuineness of these books derived from the language, dialect, idiom, in which they are written. You can easily understand, that by these helps the country and age of a writing may often be traced ; but the argument belongs to the learned. It may however be satisfactory to know, that the profoundest scholars see in the dialect and idiom of the Gospels a precise accordance with what might be expected of Jews, writing in the age of the Apostles.

Another internal proof, and one within the reach of all, may be gathered from the style and character of the evangelical narratives. They are written with the simplicity, minuteness, and ease, which are the natural tones of truth, which belong to writers thoroughly acquainted with their subjects, and writing from reality. *You discover in them* nothing of the labor, caution,

and indistinctness, which can scarcely be escaped by men, who are assuming a character not their own, and aiming to impose on the world. There is a difference which we have all discerned and felt, though we cannot describe it, between an honest, simple-hearted witness, who tells what he has seen or is intimately acquainted with, and the false witness, who affects an intimate knowledge of events and individuals, which are in whole or in part his own fabrication. Truth has a native frankness, an unaffected freedom, a style and air of its own, and never were narratives more strongly characterized by these than the Gospels. It is a striking circumstance in these books, that whilst the life and character which they portray, are the most extraordinary in history, the style is the most artless. There is no straining for epithets or for elevation of language to suit the dignity of the great personage who is the subject. You hear plain men, telling you what they know of a character, which they venerated too much to think of adorning or extolling it. It is also worthy of remark, that the character of Jesus, though the most peculiar and exalted in history, though the last to be invented and the hardest to be sustained, is yet unfolded through a great variety of details and conditions, with perfect unity and consistency. The strength of this proof can only be understood by those who are sufficiently acquainted with literary history to appreciate the difficulty of accomplishing a consistent and successful forgery. Such consistency is, in the present case, an almost infallible test. Suppose four writers, of a later age, to have leagued *together in the scheme* of personating the first propa-

gators of Christianity, and of weaving, in their name, the histories of their Master's life. Removed as these men would have been from the original, and having no model or type of his character in the elevation of their own minds, they must have portrayed him with an unsteady hand, must have marred their work with incongruous features, must have brought down their hero on some occasion to the ordinary views and feelings of men, and in particular must have been warped in their selection and representation of incidents by the private purpose which led them to this singular coöperation. That four writers, under such circumstances, should sustain throughout so peculiar and elevated a character as Jesus, and should harmonize with each other in the delineation, would be a prodigy which no genius, however preëminent, could achieve. I say, then, that the narratives bear strong internal marks of having been drawn from the living original, by those who had the best means of knowing his character and life.

So various, strong, sufficient are the proofs that the four Gospels are the works of the first preachers of Christianity, whose names they bear. I will only add, that the genuineness of few ancient books is supported by proofs equally strong. Most of the works, which have come down to us from antiquity, and which are ascribed to their reputed writers with undoubting confidence, are so ascribed on evidence inferior to that on which the claims of the Evangelists rest. On this point therefore not a doubt should remain.

Here I pause. The proofs of Christianity, which are *involved in or founded on* the facts now established, *will be the subjects of future discussion.*

PART II.

I HAVE now stated some of the great facts relating to the origin of Christianity, of which we have clear and full proof. We know when and where this religion sprung up. We know its Author, and the men whom he employed as the first propagators of his doctrine. We know the great features of the religion as it was originally taught; and still more, we have the writings of its first teachers, by which its precise character is placed beyond doubt. I now proceed to lay before you some of the arguments in support of Christianity, which are involved in or are founded on these facts. I must confine myself to a few, and will select those to which some justice may be done in the compass of a discourse.

I. I believe Christianity to be true, or to have come from God, because it seems to me impossible to trace it to any other origin. It must have had a cause, and no other adequate cause can be assigned. The incongruity between this religion and all the circumstances amidst which it grew up, is so remarkable, that we are compelled to look beyond and above this world for its explanation. When I go back to the origin of Christianity, and place myself in the age and country of its birth, I can find nothing in the opinions of men, or in the state of society, which can account for its

beginning or diffusion. There was no power on earth to create or uphold such a system. There was nothing congenial with it in Judaism, in heathenism, or in the state of society among the most cultivated communities. If you study the religions, governments, and philosophical systems of that age, you will discover in them not even a leaning towards Christianity. It sprung up in opposition to all, making no compromise with human prejudice or passion ; and it sprung up, not only superior to all, but possessing at its very beginning a perfection, which has been the admiration of ages, and which, instead of being dimmed by time, has come forth more brightly, in proportion to the progress of the human mind.

I know, indeed, that at the origin of our religion, the old heathen worship had fallen into disrepute among the enlightened classes through the Roman Empire, and was gradually losing its hold on the populace. Accordingly some have pretended that Christianity grew from the ruins of the ancient faith. But this is not true ; for the decline of the heathen systems was the product of causes singularly adverse to the origination of such a system as Christianity. One cause was the monstrous depravity of the age, which led multitudes to an utter scorn of religion in all its forms and restraints, and which prepared others to exchange their old worship for still grosser and more licentious superstitions, particularly for the magical arts of Egypt. Surely this corruption of manners, this wide-wasting moral pestilence, will not be considered by any as a germ of the Christian religion. *Another principal agent*, in loosening the foundations

of the old systems, was Philosophy, a noble effort indeed of the human intellect, but one which did nothing to prepare the way for Christianity. The most popular systems of philosophy at the birth of Christianity were the Skeptical and the Epicurean, the former of which turned religion into a jest, denied the possibility of arriving at truth, and cast the mind on an ocean of doubt in regard to every subject of inquiry; whilst the latter placed happiness in ease, inculcated a calm indifference both as to this world and the next, and would have set down the Christian doctrine of self-sacrifice, of suffering for truth and duty, as absolute insanity. Now I ask in what single point do these systems touch Christianity, or what impulse could they have given to its invention. There was indeed another philosophical sect of a nobler character; I mean the Stoical. This maintained that virtue was the supreme good, and it certainly nurtured some firm and lofty spirits amidst the despotism which then ground all classes in the dust. But the self-reliance, sternness, apathy, and pride of the Stoic, his defiance and scorn of mankind, his want of sympathy with human suffering, and his extravagant exaggerations of his own virtue, placed this sect in singular opposition to Christianity; so that our religion might as soon have sprung from Skepticism and Epicureanism, as from Stoicism. There was another system, if it be worthy of the name, which prevailed in Asia, and was not unknown to the Jews, often called the Oriental philosophy. But this, though certainly an improvement on the common heathenism, was visionary and mystical, and placed happiness in an intuition

or immediate perception of God, which was to be gained by contemplation and ecstasies, by emaciation of the body, and desertion of the world. I need not tell you how infinitely removed was the practical, benevolent spirit of Christianity, from this spurious sanctity and profitless enthusiasm. I repeat it then, that the various causes which were silently operating against the established heathen systems in the time of Christ had no tendency to suggest and spread such a religion as he brought, but were as truly hostile to it as the worst forms of heathenism.

We cannot find then the origin of Christianity in the heathen world. Shall we look for it in the Jewish? This topic is too familiar to need much exposition. You know the character, feelings, expectations of the decendants of Abraham at the appearing of Jesus; and you need not be told that a system, more opposed to the Jewish mind than that which he taught, cannot be imagined. There was nothing friendly to it in the soil or climate of Judea. As easily might the luxuriant trees of our forests spring from the sands of an Arabian desert. There was never perhaps a national character so deeply stamped as the Jewish. Ages after ages of unparalleled suffering have done little to wear away its indelible features. In the time of Jesus the whole influence of education and religion was employed to fix it in every member of the state. In the bosom of this community, and among its humblest classes, sprung up Christianity, a religion as unfettered by Jewish prejudices, as untainted by the earthly, narrow views of the age, as if it had come from another world. Judaism was all around it, but

did not mar it by one trace, or sully its brightness by a single breath. Can we find, then, the cause of Christianity in the Jewish any more than in the heathen world ?

Christianity, I maintain, was not the growth of any of the circumstances, principles, or feelings of the age in which it appeared. In truth, one of the great distinctions of the Gospel is, that it did not *grow*. The conception, which filled the mind of Jesus, of a religion more spiritual, generous, comprehensive, and unworldly than Judaism, and destined to take its place, was not of gradual formation. We detect no signs of it, and no efforts to realize it, before his time ; nor is there an appearance of its having been gradually matured by Jesus himself. Christianity was delivered from the first in its full proportions, in a style of singular freedom and boldness, and without a mark of painful elaboration. This suddenness with which this religion broke forth, this maturity of the system at the very moment of its birth, this absence of gradual developement, seems to me a strong mark of its divine original. If Christianity be a human invention, then I can be pointed to something in the history of the age which impelled and fitted the mind of its author to its production ; then I shall be able to find some germ of it, some approximation to it, in the state of things amidst which it first appeared. How was it, that from thick darkness there burst forth at once meridian light ? Were I told that the sciences of the civilized world had sprung up to perfection at once, amidst a barbarous horde, I should pronounce it incredible. Nor can I *easily believe, that Christianity, the religion of un-*

bounded love, a religion which broke down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, and the barriers between nations, which proclaimed one Universal Father, which abolished forms and substituted the worship of the soul, which condemned alike the false greatness of the Roman and the false holiness of the Jew, and which taught an elevation of virtue, that the growing knowledge of succeeding ages has made more admirable; — I say I cannot easily believe, that such a religion was suddenly, immediately struck out by human ingenuity among a people, distinguished by bigotry and narrowness of spirit, by superstitious reliance on outward worship, by hatred and scorn of other nations, and by the proud, impatient hope of soon bending all nations to their sway.

Christianity, I repeat it, was not the growth of the age in which it appeared. It had no sympathy with that age. It was the echo of no sect or people. It stood alone at the moment of its birth. It used not a word of conciliation. It stooped to no error or passion. It had its own tone, the tone of authority and superiority to the world. It struck at the root of what was every where called glory, reversed the judgments of all former ages, passed a condemning sentence on the idols of this world's admiration, and held forth, as the perfection of human nature, a spirit of love, so pure and divine, so free and full, so mild and forgiving, so invincible in fortitude yet so tender in its sympathies, that even now few comprehend it in its extent and elevation. Such a religion had not its origin in this world.

I have thus sought to unfold one of the evidences of Christianity. Its incongruity with the age of its birth, its freedom from earthly mixtures, its original, unborrowed, solitary greatness, and the suddenness with which it broke forth amidst the general gloom, these are to me strong indications of its divine descent. I cannot reconcile them with a human origin.

II. Having stated the argument in favor of Christianity derived from the impossibility of accounting for it by the state of the world at the time of its birth, I proceed in the second place to observe, that it cannot be accounted for by any of the motives which instigate men to the fabrication of religions. Its aims and objects are utterly irreconcilable with imposture. They are pure, lofty, and worthy of the most illustrious delegate of heaven. This argument deserves to be unfolded with some particularity.

Men act from Motives. The inventors of religions have purposes to answer by them. Some systems have been framed by legislators to procure reverence to their laws, to bow the minds of the people to the civil power; and some have been forged by priests, to establish their sway over the multitude, to form themselves into a dominant caste, and to extort the wealth of the industrious. Now I affirm, that Christianity cannot be ascribed to any selfish, ambitious, earthly motive. It is suited to no private end. Its purpose is generous and elevated, and thus bears witness to its heavenly origin.

The great object which has seduced men to pretend to inspiration, and to spread false religions, has been


Power, in one form or another, sometimes political power, sometimes spiritual, sometimes both. Is Christianity to be explained by this selfish aim? I answer, No. I affirm that the love of power is the last principle to be charged on the Founder of our religion. Christianity is distinguished by nothing more than by its earnest enforcement of a meek and humble spirit, and by its uncompromising reprobation of that passion for dominion, which had in all ages made the many the prey of the few, and had been worshipped as the attribute and impulse of the greatest minds. Its teaching on this subject was original, and altogether its own. Jesus felt, as none had felt before, and as few feel now, the baseness of selfish ambition, and the grandeur of that benevolence which waives every mark of superiority, that it may more effectually bless mankind. He taught this lesson, not only in the boldest language, but, accommodating himself to the emblematical mode of religious instruction prevalent in the East, he set before his disciples a little child as their pattern, and himself washed their feet. His whole life was a commentary on his teaching. Not a trace of the passion for distinction and sway can be detected in the artless narratives of his historians. He wore no badge of superiority, exacted no signs of homage, coveted no attentions, resented no neglect. He discouraged the ruler who prostrated himself before him with flattering salutations, but received with affectionate sensibility the penitent who bathed his feet with her tears. He lived with his obscure disciples as a friend, and mixed freely with all ranks of the community. He placed himself in the way of scorn, and advanced to meet a death,

more suited than any other imaginable event, to entail infamy on his name. Stronger marks of an infinite superiority to what the world calls glory cannot be conceived, than we meet in the history of Jesus.

I have named two kinds of power, Political and Spiritual, as the ordinary objects of false religions. I wish to show you more particularly the elevation of Christianity above these aims. That the gospel was not framed for political purposes, is too plain to require proof; but its peculiarity in this respect is not sufficiently considered. In ancient times, religion was every where a national concern. In Judea the union between religion and government was singularly close; political sovereignty was one of the chief splendors, with which the Jewish imagination had surrounded the expected Messiah. That in such an age and country, a religion should arise, which hardly seems to know that government exists; which makes no reference to it except in a few general inculcations of obedience to the civil powers; which says not a word nor throws out a hint of allying itself with the state; which assumes to itself no control of political affairs, and intermeddles with no public concerns; which has no tendency, however indirect, to accumulate power in particular hands; which provides no form of national worship as a substitute for those which it was intended to destroy; and which treats the distinction of rank and office as worthless in comparison with moral influence and an unostentatious charity; — that such a religion should spring up in such a state of the world is a remarkable fact. We here see a broad line between Christianity and other systems, and a striking

proof of its originality and elevation. Other systems were framed for communities ; Christianity approached men as Individuals. It proposed, not the glory of the state, but the perfection of the individual mind. So far from being contrived to build up political power, Christianity tends to reduce and gradually to supplant it, by teaching men to substitute the sway of truth and love for menace and force, by spreading through all ranks a feeling of brotherhood altogether opposed to the spirit of domination, and by establishing principles which nourish self-respect in every human being, and teach the obscurest to look with an undazzled eye on the most powerful of their race.

Christianity bears no mark of the hands of a politician. One of its main purposes is to extinguish the very spirit which the ambitious statesman most anxiously cherishes, and on which he founds his success. It proscribes a narrow patriotism, shows no mercy to the spirit of conquest, requires its disciples to love other countries as truly as their own, and enjoins a spirit of peace and forbearance in language so broad and earnest, that not a few of its professors consider war in every shape and under all circumstances as a crime. The hostility between Christianity and all the political maxims of that age, cannot easily be comprehended at the present day. No doctrines were then so rooted, as that conquest was the chief interest of nation, and that an exclusive patriotism was the first and noblest of social virtues. Christianity, in loosening the tie which bound man to the state, that it might connect him with his race, opposed itself to what was deemed *the vital principle of national safety and grandeur, and*



commenced a political revolution as original and unsparing as the religious and moral reform at which it aimed.

Christianity, then, was not framed for political purposes. But I shall be asked whether it stands equally clear of the charge of being intended to accumulate Spiritual power. Some may ask, whether its founder was not instigated by the passion for religious domination, whether he did not aim to subdue men's minds, to dictate to the faith of the world, to make himself the leader of a spreading sect, to stamp his name as a prophet on human history, and thus to secure the prostration of multitudes to his will, more abject and entire than kings and conquerors can achieve.

To this I might reply by what I have said of the character of Jesus, and of the spirit of his religion. It is plain, that the founder of Christianity had a perception, quite peculiar to himself, of the moral beauty and greatness of a disinterested, meek, and self-sacrificing spirit, and such a person was not likely to meditate the subjugation of the world to himself. But, leaving this topic, I observe, that on examining Christianity we discover none of the features of a religion framed for spiritual domination. One of the infallible marks of such a system is, that it makes some terms with the passions and prejudices of men. It does not, cannot provoke and ally against itself all the powers, whether civil or religious, of the world. Christianity was throughout uncompromising and exasperating, and threw itself in the way of hatred and scorn. Such a system was any thing but a scheme for seizing the spiritual empire of the world.

There is another mark of a religion which springs from the love of spiritual domination. It infuses a servile spirit. Its author, desirous to stamp his name and image on his followers, has an interest in curbing the free action of their minds, imposes on them arbitrary doctrines, fastens on them badges which may separate them from others, and besets them with rules, forms, and distinctive observances, which may perpetually remind them of their relation to their chief. Now I see nothing in Christianity of this enslaving legislation. It has but one aim, which is, not to exalt its teacher, but to improve the disciple; not to fasten Christ's name on mankind, but to breathe into them his spirit of universal love. Christianity is not a religion of forms. It has but two ceremonies, as simple as they are expressive; and these hold so subordinate a place in the New Testament, that some of the best Christians question or deny their permanent obligation. Neither is it a narrow creed, or a mass of doctrines which find no support in our rational nature. It may be summed up in a few great, universal, immutable principles, which reason and conscience, as far as they are unfolded, adopt and rejoice in, as their own everlasting laws, and which open perpetually enlarging views to the mind. As far as I am a Christian, I am free. My religion lays on me not one chain. It does not prescribe a certain range for my mind, beyond which nothing can be learned. It speaks of God as the Universal Father, and sends me to all his works for instruction. It does not hem me round with a mechanical ritual, does not enjoin forms, attitudes, and *hours of prayer*, does not descend to details of dress

and food, does not put on me one outward badge. It teaches and enkindles love to God, but commands no precise expressions of this sentiment. It prescribes prayer ; but lays the chief stress on the prayer of the closet, and treats all worship as worthless but that of the mind and heart. It teaches us to do good, but leaves us to devise for ourselves the means by which we may best serve mankind. In a word, the whole religion of Christ may be summed up in the love of God and of mankind, and it leaves the individual to cherish and express this spirit by the methods most accordant with his own condition and peculiar mind. Christianity is eminently the religion of freedom. The views which it gives of the parental, impartial, universal goodness of God, and of the equal right of every human being to inquire into his will, and its inculcations of candor, forbearance, and mutual respect, contribute alike to freedom of thought and enlargement of the heart. I repeat it, Christianity lays on me no chains. It is any thing but a contrivance for spiritual domination.

I am aware that I shall be told, that Christianity, if judged by its history, has no claim to the honorable title of a religion of liberty. I shall be told, that no system of heathenism ever weighed more oppressively on men's souls ; that the Christian ministry has trained tyrants, who have tortured, now the body with material fire, and now the mind with the dread of fiercer flames, and who have proscribed and punished free thought and free speech as the worst of crimes. I have no disposition to soften the features of priestly oppression ; but I say, let not Christianity be made to answer for it. Christianity gives its ministers no

such power. They have usurped it in the face of the sternest prohibitions, and in opposition to the whole spirit, of their Master. Christianity institutes no priesthood, in the original and proper sense of that word. It has not the name of priest among its officers; nor does it confer a shadow of priestly power. It invests no class of men with peculiar sanctity, ascribing to their intercessions a special influence over God, or suspending the salvation of the private Christian on ceremonies which they alone can administer. Jesus indeed appointed twelve of his immediate disciples to be the great instruments of propagating his religion; but nothing can be simpler than their office. They went forth to make known through all nations the life, death, resurrection, and teachings of Jesus Christ; and this truth they spread freely and without reserve. They did not give it as a mystery to a few who were to succeed them in their office, and according to whose direction it was to be imparted to others. They communicated it to the whole body of converts, to be their equal and common property, thus securing to all the invaluable rights of the mind. It is true, they appointed ministers or teachers in the various congregations which they formed; and in that early age, when the religion was new and unknown, and when oral teaching was the only mode of communicating it, there seems to have been *no way* for its diffusion but this appointment of the most enlightened disciples to the work of instruction. But the New Testament no where intimates, that these men were to monopolize the privilege of studying their religion, *or of teaching it* to others. Not a single man can

claim under Christianity the right to interpret it exclusively, or to impose his interpretation on his brethren. The Christian minister enjoys no nearer access to God, and no promise of more immediate illumination, than other men. He is not entrusted with the Christian records more than they, and by these records it is both their right and duty to try his instructions. I have here pointed out a noble peculiarity of Christianity. It is the religion of liberty. It is in no degree tainted with the passion for spiritual power. "Call no man master, for ye are all brethren," is its free and generous inculcation, and to every form of freedom it is a friend and defence.

We have seen that Christianity is not to be traced to the love of power, that master passion in the authors of false religions. I add, that no other object of a selfish nature could have led to its invention. The Gospel is not of this world. At the time of its origin no ingenuity could have brought it to bear on any private or worldly interest. Its spirit is self-denial. Wealth, ease, and honor it counts among the chief perils of life, and it insists on no duty more earnestly ~~than~~ *that* on that of putting them to hazard and casting them from us, if the cause of truth and humanity so require. And these maxims were not mere speculations or rhetorical common-places in the times of Christ and his Apostles. The first propagators of Christianity were called upon to practise what they preached, to forego every interest on its account. They could not but foreknow, that a religion so uncompromising and pure would array against them the world. *They did not merely take the chance of*

suffering, but were sure that the whole weight of scorn, pain, and worldly persecution would descend on their heads. How inexplicable, then, is Christianity by any selfish object, or any low aim ?

The Gospel has but one object, and that too plain to be mistaken. In reading the New Testament, we see the greatest simplicity of aim. There is no lurking purpose, no by-end, betraying itself through attempts to disguise it. A perfect singleness of design runs through the records of the religion, and is no mean evidence of their truth. This end of Christianity is the moral perfection of the human soul. It aims and it tends, in all its doctrines, precepts, and promises, to rescue men from the power of moral evil ; to unite them to God by filial love, and to one another in the bonds of brotherhood ; to inspire them with a philanthropy as meek and unconquerable as that of Christ ; and to kindle intense desire, hope, and pursuit of celestial and immortal virtue.

And now, I ask, what is the plain inference from these views ? If Christianity can be traced to no selfish or worldly motive, if it was framed, not for dominion, not to compass any private purpose, but to raise men above themselves, and to conform them to God, can we help pronouncing it worthy of God ? And to whom but to God can we refer its origin ? Ought we not to recognise in the first propagators of such a faith the holiest of men, the friends of their race, and the messengers of Heaven ? Christianity, from its very nature, repels the charge of imposture. It carries in itself *the proof of pure intention*. Bad men could not have *conceived it*, much less have adopted it as the great

object of their lives. The supposition of selfish men giving up every private interest to spread a system which condemned themselves, and which tended only to purify mankind, is an absurdity as gross as can be found in the most irrational faith. Christianity, therefore, when tried by its Motives, approves itself to be of God.

III. I now proceed to another and very important ground of my belief in the divine origin of Christianity. Its truth was attested by miracles. Its first teachers proved themselves the ministers of God by supernatural works. They did what man cannot do, what bore the impress of a divine power, and what thus sealed the divinity of their mission. A religion so attested must be true. This topic is a great one, and I ask your patient attention to it.

I am aware that a strong prejudice exists in some minds against the kind of evidence which I have now adduced. Miracles seem to them to carry a confutation in themselves. The presumption against them seems next to infinite. In this respect, the present times differ from the past. There have been ages, when men believed any thing and every thing; and the more monstrous the story, the more eagerly was it received by the credulous multitude. In the progress of knowledge men have come to see, that most of the prodigies and supernatural events in which their forefathers believed, were fictions of fancy, or fear, or imposture. The light of knowledge has put to flight the ghosts and witches which struck terror *into earlier times*. We now know, that not a few


of the appearances in the heavens, which appalled nations, and were interpreted as precursors of divine vengeance, were natural effects. We have learned, too, that a highly excited imagination can work some of the cures once ascribed to magic; and the lesson taught us by these natural solutions of apparent miracles, is, that accounts of supernatural events are to be sifted with great jealousy and received with peculiar care.

But the result of this new light thrown on nature and history is, that some are disposed to discredit all miracles indiscriminately. So many having proved groundless, a sweeping sentence of condemnation is passed on all. The human mind, by a natural reaction, has passed from extreme credulousness, to the excess of incredulity. Some persons are even hardy enough to deride the very idea of a miracle. They pronounce the order of nature something fixed and immutable, and all suspensions of it incredible. This prejudice, for such it is, seems to deserve particular attention; for, until it is removed, the evidences of Christian miracles will have little weight. Let us examine it patiently and impartially.

The skeptic tells me, that the order of nature is fixed. I ask him, By whom or by what is it fixed? By an iron fate? By an inflexible necessity? Does not nature bear the signatures of an intelligent cause? Does not the very idea of its order imply an ordaining or disposing mind? Does not the universe, the more it is explored, bear increasing testimony to a Being *superior* to itself? Then the order of nature is fixed *by a Will which can reverse it*. Then a power equal *to miracles exists*. Then miracles are not incredible.

It may be replied, that God indeed *can* work miracles, but that he *will* not. He will not? And how does the skeptic know this? Has God so told him? This language does not become a being of our limited faculties; and the presumptuousness which thus makes laws for the Creator, and restricts his agency to particular modes, is as little the spirit of true philosophy as of religion.

The skeptic sees nothing in miracles, but ground of offence. To me they seem to involve in their very nature a truth so great, so vital, that I am not only reconciled to them, but am disposed to receive joyfully any sufficient proofs of their having been performed. To the skeptic, no principle is so important as the uniformity of nature, the constancy of its laws. To me there is a vastly higher truth, to which miracles bear witness, and to which I welcome their aid. What I wish chiefly to know is, that Mind is the supreme power in the universe; that matter is its instrument and slave; that there is a Will to which nature can offer no obstruction; that God is unshackled by the laws of the universe, and controls them at his pleasure. This absolute sovereignty of the Divine Mind over the universe, is the only foundation of hope for the triumph of the human mind over matter, over physical influences, over imperfection and death. Now it is plain, that the strong impressions which we receive through the senses from the material creation, joined to our experience of its regularity, and to our instinctive trust in its future uniformity, do obscure this supremacy of God, do tempt us to ascribe a kind of *omnipotence* to nature's laws, and to limit our



hopes to the good which is promised by these. There is a strong tendency in men to attach the idea of necessity to an unchanging regularity of operation, and to imagine bounds to a being, who keeps one undeviating path, or who repeats himself perpetually. Hence, I say, that I rejoice in miracles. They show and assert the supremacy of Mind in the universe. They manifest a spiritual power, which is in no degree enthralled by the laws of matter. I rejoice in these witnesses to so great a truth. I rejoice in whatever proves, that this order of nature, which so often weighs on me as a chain, and which contains no promise of my perfection, is not supreme and immutable, and that the Creator is not restricted to the narrow modes of operation with which I am most familiar.

Perhaps the form, in which the objection to miracles is most frequently expressed, is the following: "It is derogatory," says the skeptic, "to the perfect wisdom of God to suppose him to break in upon the order of his own works. It is only the unskilful artist who is obliged to thrust his hand into the machine for the purpose of supplying its defects, and of giving it a new impulse by an immediate agency." To this objection I reply, that it proceeds on false ideas of God and of the creation. God is not an artist, but a Moral Parent and Governor; nor is the creation a machine. If it were, it might be urged with greater speciousness that miracles cannot be needed or required. One of the most striking views of the creation is the contrast or opposition of the elements of which it consists. It includes not only matter but mind, not only *lifeless and unconscious masses*, but rational beings,

free agents; and these are its noblest parts and ultimate objects. The material universe was framed not for itself, but for these. Its order was not appointed for its own sake, but to instruct and improve a higher rank of beings, the intelligent offspring of God; and whenever a departure from this order, that is, whenever miraculous agency can contribute to the growth and perfection of his intelligent creatures, it is demanded by his wisdom, goodness, and all his attributes. If the Supreme Being proposed only such ends as mechanism can produce, then he might have framed a machinery so perfect and sure as to need no suspension of its ordinary movements. But he has an incomparably nobler end. His great purpose is to educate, to rescue from evil, to carry forward for ever the free, rational mind or soul; and who that understands what a free mind is, and what a variety of teaching and discipline it requires, will presume to affirm, that no lights or aids, but such as come to it through an invariable order of nature, are necessary to unfold it?


Much of the difficulty in regard to miracles, as I apprehend, would be removed, if we were to consider more particularly, that the chief distinction of intelligent beings is Moral Freedom, the power of determining themselves to evil as well as good, and consequently the power of involving themselves in great misery. When God made man, he framed not a machine, but a free being, who was to rise or fall according to his use or abuse of his powers. This capacity, at once the most glorious and the most fearful which we can conceive, shows us how the human race may have come

into a condition, to which the illumination of nature was inadequate. In truth, the more we consider the freedom of intelligent beings, the more we shall question the possibility of establishing an unchangeable order which will meet fully all their wants; for such beings, having of necessity a wide range of action, may bring themselves into a vast variety of conditions, and of course may come to need a relief not contained in the resources of nature. The history of the human race illustrates these truths. At the introduction of Christianity, the human family were plunged into gross and debasing error, and the light of nature had not served for ages to guide them back to truth. Philosophy had done its best and failed. A new element, a new power seems to have been wanting to the progress the race. That in such an exigence miraculous aid should be imparted, accords with our best views of God. I repeat it; were men mechanical beings, an undeviating order of nature might meet all their wants. They are free beings, who bear a moral relation to God, and as such may need, and are worthy of, a more various and special care than is extended over the irrational creation.

When I examine nature, I see reasons for believing that it was not intended by God to be the only method of instructing and improving mankind. I see reasons, as I think, why its order or regular course should be occasionally suspended, and why revelation should be joined to it in the work of carrying forward the race. I can offer only a few considerations on this point, but they seem to me worthy of serious attention.—The first *is, that a fixed, invariable order of nature does not give*

us some views of God which are of great interest and importance, or at least it does not give them with that distinctness which we all desire. It reveals him as the Universal Sovereign who provides for the whole or for the general weal, but not, with sufficient clearness, as a tender father, interested in the Individual. I see, in this fixed order, his care of the race, but not his constant, boundless concern for myself. Nature speaks of a general Divinity, not of the friend and benefactor of each living soul. This is a necessary defect attending an inflexible, unvarying administration by general laws; and it seems to require that God, to carry forward the race, should reveal himself by some other manner than by general laws. No conviction is more important to human improvement than that of God's paternal interest in every human being; and how can he communicate this persuasion so effectually, as by suspending nature's order, to teach, through an inspired messenger, his paternal love?


My second remark is, that whilst nature teaches many important lessons, it is not a direct, urgent teacher. Its truths are not prominent, and consequently men may neglect it, and place themselves beyond its influence. For example, nature holds out the doctrine of One God, but does not compel attention to it. God's name is not written in the sky in letters of light, which all nations must read, nor sounded abroad in a voice, deep and awful as thunders, so that all must hear. Nature is a gentle, I had almost said, a reserved teacher, demanding patient thought in the learner, and may therefore be unheeded. Men may easily shut their ears and harden their hearts against its testimony to God.



Accordingly we learn, that, at Christ's coming, almost all nations had lost the knowledge of the true glory of the Creator, and given themselves up to gross superstitions. To such a condition of the world, nature's indirect and unimposing mode of instruction is not fitted, and thus it furnishes a reason for a more immediate and impressive teaching. In such a season of moral darkness, was it not worthy of God to kindle another and more quickening beam? When the long repeated and almost monotonous language of creation was not heard, was it unworthy of God to speak with a new and more startling voice? What fitter method was there for rousing those whom nature's quiet regularity could not teach, than to interrupt its usual course?

I proceed to another reason for expecting revelation to be added to the light of nature. Nature, I have said, is not a direct or urgent teacher, and men may place themselves beyond its voice. I say, thirdly, that there is one great point, on which we are deeply concerned to know the truth, and which is yet taught so indistinctly by nature, that men, however disposed to learn, cannot by that light alone obtain full conviction. What, let me ask, is the question in which each man has the deepest interest? It is this, Are we to live again; or is this life all? Does the principle of thought perish with the body; or does it survive? And if it survive, where? how? in what condition? under what law? There is an inward voice which speaks of judgment to come. Will judgment indeed come? and if so, what award may we hope or fear? The Future state of man, this is the great question forced on us by our *changing life and by approaching death*. I will not

say, that on this topic nature throws no light. I think it does ; and this light continually grows brighter to them whose eyes revelation has couched and made strong to see. But nature alone does not meet our wants. I might prove this by referring you to the ages preceding Christ, when the anxious spirit of man constantly sought to penetrate the gloom beyond the grave, when imagination and philosophy alike plunged into the future, but found no resting-place. But every man must feel, that, left to nature as his only guide, he must wander in doubt, as to the life to come. Where, but from God himself, can I learn my destination? I ask at the mouth of the tomb for intelligence of the departed, and the tomb gives me no reply. I examine the various regions of nature, but I can discover no process for restoring the mouldering body, and no sign or track of the spirit's ascent to another sphere. I see the need of a power above nature to restore or perpetuate life after death ; and if God intended to give assurance of this life, I see not how he can do it but by supernatural teaching, by a miraculous revelation. Miracles are the appropriate, and would seem to be the only mode of placing beyond doubt man's future and immortal being ; and no miracles can be conceived so peculiarly adapted to this end as the very ones which hold the highest place in Christianity, — I mean the resurrection of Lazarus, and, still more, the resurrection of Jesus. No man will deny, that, of all truths, a future state is most strengthening to virtue and consoling to humanity. Is it then unworthy of God to employ miracles for the awakening or the confirmation of this hope? May they not even be expected, if nature,



as we have seen, sheds but a faint light on this most interesting of all verities ?

I add one more consideration in support of the position, that nature was not intended to be God's only method of teaching mankind. In surveying the human mind, we discover a principle which singularly fits it to be wrought upon and benefited by miraculous agency, and which might therefore lead us to expect such interposition. I refer to that principle of our nature, by which we become in a measure insensible or indifferent to what is familiar, but are roused to attention and deep interest by what is singular, strange, supernatural. This principle of wonder is an important part of our constitution ; and that God should employ it in the work of our education, is what reason might anticipate. I see, then, a foundation for miracles in the human mind ; and when I consider that the mind is God's noblest work, I ought to look to this as the interpreter of his designs. We are plainly so constituted, that the order of nature, the more it is fixed, excites us the less. Our interest is blunted by its ceaseless uniformity. On the contrary, departures from this order powerfully stir the soul, break up its old and slumbering habits of thought, turn it with a new solicitude to the Almighty Interposer, and prepare it to receive with awe the communications of his will. Was it unworthy of God who gave us this sensibility to the wonderful, to appeal to it for the recovery of his creatures to himself ?

I here close my remarks on the great objection of skepticism, that miracles are inconsistent with the *divine perfections* ; that the Supreme Being, having

established an order of operation, cannot be expected to depart from it. To me, such reasoning, if reasoning it may be called, is of no weight. When I consider God's paternal and moral relation to mankind, and his interest in their progress ; when I consider how accordant it is with his character that he should make himself known to them by methods most fitted to awaken the mind and heart to his goodness ; when I consider the need we have of illumination in regard to the future life more distinct and full than the creation affords ; when I consider the constitution and condition of man, his free agency, and the corruption into which he had fallen ; when I consider how little benefit a being so depraved was likely to derive from an order of nature to which he had grown familiar, and how plainly the mind is fitted to be quickened by miraculous interposition ; — I say, when I take all these things into view, I see, as I think, a foundation in nature for supernatural light and aid, and I discern in a miraculous revelation, such as Christianity, a provision suited at once to the frame and wants of the human soul, and to the perfections of its Author.

There are other objections to miracles, though less avowed, than that which I have now considered, yet perhaps not less influential, and probably operating on many minds so secretly as to be unperceived. At two of these I will just glance. Not a few, I am confident, have doubts of the Christian miracles, because they see none *now*. Were their skepticism to clothe itself in language it would say, "Show us miracles, and we will believe them. We suspect them, because they are *confined to the past*." Now this objection is a

childish one. It may be resolved into the principle, that nothing in the past is worthy of belief, which is not repeated in the present. Admit this, and where will incredulity stop? How many forms and institutions of society, recorded in ancient history, have passed away. Has history then no title to respect? If indeed the human race were standing still, if one age were merely a copy of preceding ones, if each had precisely the same wants, then the miracles required at one period would be reproduced in all. But who does not know that there is a progress in human affairs? that formerly mankind were in a different stage from that through which they are now passing? that of course the education of the race must be varied? and that miracles, important once, may be superfluous now? Shall we bind the Creator to invariable modes of teaching and training a race whose capacities and wants are undergoing a perpetual change? Because in periods of thick darkness God introduced a new religion by supernatural works, shall we expect these works to be repeated, when the darkness is scattered and their end attained? Who does not see that miracles, from their very nature, must be rare, occasional, limited? Would not their power be impaired by frequency? and would it not wholly cease, were they so far multiplied as to seem a part of the order of nature?

The objection I am now considering shows us the true character of skepticism. Skepticism is essentially a narrowness of mind, which makes the present moment the measure of the past and future. It is the creature of sense. In the midst of a boundless universe, it can conceive no mode of operation but what

falls under its immediate observation. The visible, the present is every thing to the unbeliever. Let him but enlarge his views ; let him look round on the immensity of the universe ; let him consider the infinity of resources which are comprehended in omnipotence ; let him represent to himself the manifold stages through which the human race is appointed to pass ; let him remember that the education of the ever-growing mind must require a great variety of discipline ; and especially let him admit the sublime thought, of which the germ is found in nature, that man was created to be trained for, and to ascend to an incomparably higher order of existence than the present, — and he will see the childishness of making his narrow experience the standard of all that is past and is to come in human history.

It is strange indeed, that men of science should fall into this error. The improved science of the present day teaches them, that this globe of ours, which seems so unchangeable, is not now what it was a few thousand years ago. They find proofs by digging into the earth, that this globe was inhabited, before the existence of the human race, by classes of animals which have perished, and the ocean peopled by races now unknown, and that the human race are occupying a ruined and restored world. Men of science should learn to free themselves from the vulgar narrowness which sees nothing in the past but the present, and should learn the stupendous and infinite variety of the dispensations of God.

There is another objection to miracles, and the last to be now considered, which is drawn from the well-known fact, *that pretended miracles crowd the pages of ancient*

history. No falsehoods, we are told, have been more common than accounts of prodigies, and therefore the miraculous character of Christianity is a presumption against its truth. I acknowledge that this argument has its weight; and I am ready to say, that, did I know nothing of Christianity, but that it was a religion full of miracles; did I know nothing of its doctrines, its purpose, its influences, and whole history, I should suspect it as much as the unbeliever. There is a strong presumption against miracles, considered nakedly, or separated from their design and from all circumstances which explain and support them. There is a like presumption against events not miraculous, but of an extraordinary character. But this is only a reason for severe scrutiny and slow belief, not for resisting strong and multiplied proofs. I blame no man for doubting a report of miracles when first brought to his ears. Thousands of absurd prodigies have been created by ignorance and fanaticism, and thousands more been forged by imposture. I invite you, then, to try scrupulously the miracles of Christianity; and if they bear the marks of the superstitious legends of false religions, do not spare them. I only ask for them a fair hearing and calm investigation.

It is plainly no sufficient argument for rejecting all miracles, that men have believed in many which are false. If you go back to the times when miraculous stories were swallowed most greedily, and read the books then written on history, geography, and natural science, you will find all of them crowded with error; but do they therefore contain nothing worthy your trust? *Is there not a vein of truth running through*

the prevalent falsehood? And cannot a sagacious mind very often detach the real from the fictitious, explain the origin of many mistakes, distinguish the judicious and honest from the credulous or interested narrator, and by a comparison of testimonies detect the latent truth? Where will you stop, if you start with believing nothing on points where former ages have gone astray? You must pronounce all religion and all morality to be delusion, for on both topics men have grossly erred. Nothing is more unworthy of a philosopher, than to found a universal censure on a limited number of unfavorable facts. This is much like the reasoning of the misanthrope, who, because he sees much vice, infers that there is no virtue, and, because he has sometimes been deceived, pronounces all men hypocrites.

I maintain that the multiplicity of false miracles, far from disproving, gives support to those on which Christianity rests; for, first, there is generally some foundation for falsehood, especially when it obtains general belief. The love of truth is an essential principle of human nature; men generally embrace error on account of some precious ingredient of truth mixed with it, and for the time inseparable from it. The universal belief of past ages in miraculous interpositions, is to me a presumption that miracles have entered into human history. Will the unbeliever say, that it only shows the insatiable thirst of the human mind for the supernatural? I reply, that, in this reasoning, he furnishes a weapon against himself; for a strong principle in the human mind, impelling men to seek for and to cling to miraculous agency, affords a presumption that the Author of our being, by whom this

thirst for the supernatural was given, intended to furnish objects ~~for~~ it, and to assign it a place in the education of the race.

But I observe, in the next place, and it is an observation of great importance, that the exploded miracles of ancient times, if carefully examined, not only furnish a general presumption in favor of the existence of genuine ones, but yield strong proof of the truth of ~~those in~~ particular upon which Christianity rests. I say to the skeptic, You affirm nothing but truth in declaring history to abound in false miracles ; I agree with you in exploding by far the greater part of the supernatural accounts of which ancient religions boast. But how do we know these to be false ? We do not so judge without proofs. We discern in them the marks of delusion. Now I ask you to examine these marks, and then to answer me honestly, whether you find them in the miracles of Christianity. Is there not a broad line between Christ's works and those which we both agree in rejecting ? I maintain that there is, and that nothing but ignorance can confound the Christian miracles with the prodigies of heathenism. The contrast between them is so strong as to forbid us to refer them to a common origin. The miracles of superstition carry the brand of falsehood in their own nature, and are disproved by the circumstances under which they were imposed on the multitude. The objects, for which they are said to have been wrought, are such as do not require or justify a divine interposition. Many of them are absurd, childish, or extravagant, and betray a weak intellect or *diseased imagination*. Many can be explained by natu-

ral causes. Many are attested by persons who lived in different countries and ages, and enjoyed no opportunities of inquiring into their truth. We can see the origin of many in the self-interest of those who forged them, and can account for their reception by the condition of the world. In other words, these spurious miracles were the natural growth of the ignorance, passions, prejudices, and corruptions of the times, and tended to confirm them. Now it is **not enough** to say, that these various marks of falsehood cannot be found in the Christian miracles. We find in them characters directly the reverse. They were wrought for an end worthy of God; they were wrought in an age of improvement; they are marked by a majesty, beneficence, unostentatious simplicity, and wisdom, which separate them immeasurably from the dreams of a disordered fancy or the contrivances of imposture. They can be explained by no interests, passions, or prejudices of men. They are parts of a religion, which was singularly at variance with established ideas and expectations, which breathes purity and benevolence, which transcended the improvements of the age, and which thus carries with it the presumption of a divine original. Whence this immense distance between the two classes of miracles? Will you trace both to one source, and that a polluted one? Will you ascribe to one spirit, works as different as light and darkness, as earth and heaven? I am not then shaken in my faith by the false miracles of other religions. I have no desire to keep them out of sight; I summon them as my witnesses. They show me *how naturally imposture and superstition leave the*


stamp of themselves on their fictions. They show how man, when he aspires to counterfeit God's agency, betrays more signally his impotence and folly. When I place side by side the mighty works of Jesus and the prodigies of heathenism, I see that they can no more be compared with one another, than the machinery and mock thunders of the theatre can be likened to the awful and beneficent powers of the universe.

In the preceding remarks on miracles, I have aimed chiefly to meet those general objections by which many are prejudiced against supernatural interpositions universally, and are disinclined to weigh any proof in their support. Hoping that this weak skepticism has been shown to want foundation in nature and reason, I proceed now to state more particularly the principal grounds on which I believe that the miracles ascribed to Jesus and the first propagators of Christianity, were actually wrought in attestation of its truth.

The evidences of facts are of two kinds, presumptive and direct, and both meet in support of Christian miracles. First, there are strong presumptions in its favor. To this class of proofs, belong the views already given of the accordance of revelation and miracles with the wants and principles of human nature, with the perfections of God, with his relations to his human family, and with his ordinary providence. These I need not repeat. I will only observe that a strong presumption in support of the miracles arises from the importance of the religion to which they belong. If I were told of supernatural works performed to prove, that three are more than one, or that human *life requires food* for its support, I should know that

they were false. The presumption against them would be invincible. The author of nature could never supersede its wise and stupendous order to teach what falls within the knowledge of every child. Extraordinary interpositions of God suppose that truths of extraordinary dignity and beneficence are to be imparted. Now, in Christianity I find truths of transcendent importance, which throw into shade all the discoveries of science, and which give a new character, aim, and interest to our existence. Here is a fit occasion for supernatural interposition. A presumption exists in favor of miracles, by which a religion so worthy of God is sustained.

But a presumption in favor of facts, is not enough. It indeed adds much force to the direct proofs; still these are needed, nor are they wanting to Christianity. The direct proofs of facts are chiefly of two kinds; they consist of testimony, oral or written, and of effects, traces, monuments, which the facts have left behind them. The Christian miracles are supported by both. — We have first the most unexceptionable Testimony, nothing less than that of contemporaries and eye-witnesses, of the companions of Jesus and the first propagators of his religion. We have the testimony of men who could not have been deceived as to the facts which they report; who bore their witness amidst perils and persecutions; who bore it on the very spot where their Master lived and died; who had nothing to gain, and every thing to lose, if their testimony were false; whose writings breathe the sincerest love of virtue and of mankind; and who at last sealed their attestations with their blood. More unexceptionable witnesses to facts cannot be produced or conceived.




Do you say, "These witnesses lived ages ago ; could we hear these accounts from their own lips, we should be satisfied" ? I answer, You have something better than their own lips, or than their own word taken alone. You have, as has been proved, their writings. Perhaps you hear with some surprise that a book may be a better witness than its author ; but nothing is more true, and I will illustrate it by an imaginary case in our own times.

Suppose, then, that a man claiming to be an eye-witness should relate to me the events of the three memorable days of July, in which the last revolution of France was achieved ; suppose next, that a book, a history of that revolution, published and received as true in France, should be sent to me from that country. Which is the best evidence of the facts ? I say the last. A single witness may deceive ; but that a writer should publish in France the history of a revolution, which never occurred there, or which differed essentially from the true one, is, in the highest degree, improbable ; and that such a history should obtain currency, that it should not be instantly branded as a lie, is utterly impossible. A history received by a people as true, not only gives us the testimony of the writer, but the testimony of the nation among whom it obtains credit. It is a concentration of thousands of voices, of many thousand witnesses. I say, then, that the writings of the first teachers of Christianity, received as they were by the multitude of Christians in their own times and in those which immediately followed, *are the testimonies of that multitude as well as of the writers. Thousands, nearest to the events, join in bearing testimony to the Christian miracles.*

But there is another class of evidence, sometimes more powerful than direct witnesses, and this belongs to Christianity. Facts are often placed beyond doubt by the effects which they leave behind them. This is the case with the miracles of Christ. Let me explain this branch of evidence. I am told, when absent and distant from your city, that on a certain day, a tide, such as had never been known, rose in your harbour, overflowed your wharves, and rushed into your streets; I doubt the fact; but hastening here, I see what were once streets, strewed with seaweed, and shells, and the ruins of houses, and I cease to doubt. A witness may deceive, but such effects cannot lie. All great events leave effects, and these speak directly of the cause. What, I ask, are the proofs of the American revolution? Have we none but written or oral testimony? Our free constitution, the whole form of our society, the language and spirit of our laws, all these bear witness to our English origin, and to our successful conflict for independence. Now the miracles of Christianity have left effects, which equally attest their reality, and cannot be explained without them. I go back to the age of Jesus Christ, and I am immediately struck with the commencement and rapid progress of the most remarkable revolution in the annals of the world. I see a new religion, of a character altogether its own, which bore no likeness to any past or existing faith, spreading in a few years through all civilized nations, and introducing a new era, a new state of society, a change of the human mind, which has broadly distinguished all following ages. Here is a plain fact, *which the skeptic will not deny, however he may*

explain it. I see this religion issuing from an obscure, despised, hated people. Its founder had died on the cross, a mode of punishment as disgraceful as the pillory or gallows at the present day. Its teachers were poor men, without rank, office, or education, taken from the fishing-boat and other occupations which had never furnished teachers to mankind. I see these men beginning their work on the spot where their Master's blood had been shed, as of a common malefactor ; and I hear them summoning first his murderers, and then all nations and all ranks, the sovereign on the throne, the priest in the temple, the great and the learned, as well as the poor and the ignorant, to renounce the faith and the worship which had been hallowed by the veneration of all ages, and to take the yoke of their crucified Lord. I see passion and prejudice, the sword of the magistrate, the curse of the priest, the scorn of the philosopher, and the fury of the populace joined to crush this common enemy ; and yet, without a human weapon and in opposition to all human power, I see the humble Apostles of Jesus winning their way, overpowering prejudice, breaking the ranks of their opposers, changing enemies into friends, breathing into multitudes a calm spirit of martyrdom, and carrying to the bounds of civilization, and even into half civilized regions, a religion which has contributed to advance society more than all other causes combined. Here is the effect. Here is a monument more durable than pillars or triumphal arches. Now I ask for an explanation of these effects. If Jesus Christ and his Apostles were indeed sent and empowered by God, and wrought miracles in attestation of their mission, then the establish-



ment of Christianity is explained. Suppose them, on the other hand, to have been insane enthusiasts, or selfish impostors, left to meet the whole strength of human opposition, with nothing but their own power or rather their own weakness, and you have no cause for the stupendous effect I have described. Such men could no more have changed the face of the world, than they could have turned back rivers to their sources, sunk mountains into valleys, or raised valleys to the skies. Christianity then has not only the evidence of unexceptionable witnesses, but that of effects; a proof which will grow stronger by comparing its progress with that of other religions, such as Mahometanism, which sprung from human passions, and were advanced by human power.

IV. Having given my views on the subject of Christian miracles, I now pass to the last topic of this discourse. Its extent and importance will lead me to enlarge upon it in a subsequent discourse; but a discussion of Christian evidences, in which it should find no place, would be essentially defective. I refer to the proof of Christianity derived from the Character of its Author.

The character of Jesus was Original. He formed a new era in the moral history of the human race. His perfection was not that of his age, nor a copy of the greatness which had long engrossed the world's admiration. Jesus stood apart from other men. He borrowed from none, and leaned on none. Surrounded by men of low thoughts, he rose to the conception of a higher form of human virtue than had yet been realized or imagined,

and deliberately devoted himself to its promotion, as the supreme object of his life and death. Conscious of being dedicated to this great work, he spoke with a calm dignity, an unaffected elevation, which separated him from all other teachers. Unsupported, he never wavered ; sufficient to himself, he refused alliance with wealth or power. Yet, with all this self-subsistence and uncompromising energy, his character was the mildest, the gentlest, the most attractive, ever manifested among men. It could not have been a fiction, for who could have conceived it, or who could have embodied the conception in such a life as Jesus is said to have led, in actions, words, manners so natural and unstudied, so imbued with reality, so worthy of the Son of God ?

The great distinction of Jesus was a philanthropy without mixture and without bounds ; a philanthropy, uniting grandeur and meekness in beautiful proportions ; a philanthropy, as wise as it was fervent, which comprehended the true wants and the true good of man, which compassionated, indeed, his sufferings from abroad, but which saw in the soul the deep fountain of his miseries, and labored, by regenerating this, to bring him to a pure and enduring happiness. So peculiar, so unparalleled was the benevolence of Jesus, that it has impressed itself on all future times. There went forth a virtue, a beneficent influence from his character, which operates even now. Since the death of Christ, a spirit of humanity, unknown before, has silently diffused itself over a considerable portion of the earth. A new standard of virtue has gradually possessed itself *of the veneration of men*. A new power has been

acting on society, which has done more than all other causes combined, to disarm the selfish passions, and to bind men strongly to one another and to God. What a monument have we here to the virtue of Jesus ! and if Christianity has such a Founder, it must have come from Heaven.

There are other remarkable proofs of the power and elevation of the character of Christ. It has touched and conciliated not a few of the determined adversaries of his religion. Infidelity, whilst it has laid unsparing hands on the system, has generally shrunk from offering violence to its Author. In truth, unbelievers have occasionally borne eloquent testimony to the benignant and celestial virtues of Jesus ; and I record this with pleasure, not only as honorable to Christianity, but as showing that unbelief does not universally sear the moral feelings, or breathe hostility to goodness. Nor is this all. The character of Christ has withstood the most deadly and irresistible foe of error and unfounded claims, I mean, Time. It has lost nothing of its elevation by the improvements of ages. Since he appeared, society has gone forward, men's views have become enlarged, and philosophy has risen to conceptions of far purer virtues than were the boast of antiquity. But, however the human mind may have advanced, it must still look upward, if it would see and understand Christ. He is still above it. Nothing purer, nobler, has yet dawned on human thoughts. Then Christianity is true. The delineation of Jesus in the Gospels, so warm with life, and so unrivalled in loveliness and grandeur, required the existence of an original. To suppose that this character was invented

by unprincipled men, amidst Jewish and heathen darkness, and was then imposed as a reality in the very age of the founder of Christianity, argues on excess of credulity, and a strange ignorance of the powers and principles of human nature. The character of Jesus was real; and if so, Jesus must have been what he professed to be, the Son of God and the revealer of his mercy and his will to mankind.

I have now completed what I proposed in this discourse. I have laid before you some of the principal evidences of Christianity. I have aimed to state them without exaggeration. That an honest mind, which thoroughly comprehends them, can deny their force, seems to me hardly possible. Stronger proofs may indeed be conceived; but it is doubtful, whether these could be given in consistency with our moral nature, and with the moral government of God. Such a government requires, that truth should not be forced on the mind, but that we should be left to gain it, by an upright use of our understandings, and by conforming ourselves to what we have already learned. God might indeed shed on us an overpowering light, so that it would be impossible for us to lose our way; but in so doing, he would annihilate an important part of our present probation. It is then no objection to Christianity, that its evidences are not the very strongest which might be given, and that they do not extort universal assent. In this respect, it accords with other great truths. These are not forced on our belief. Whoever will, may shut his eyes on their proofs, and array against them *objections*. In the measure of evidence with which

Christianity is accompanied, I see a just respect for the freedom of the mind, and a wise adaptation to that moral nature, which it is the great aim of this religion to carry forward to perfection.

I close as I began. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ ; for it is True. It is true ; and its truth is to break forth more and more gloriously. Of this I have not a doubt. I know indeed that our religion has been questioned even by intelligent and good men ; but this does not shake my faith in its divine original or in its ultimate triumphs. Such men have questioned it, because they have known it chiefly by its corruptions. In proportion as its original simplicity shall be restored, the doubts of the well-disposed will yield. I have no fears from infidelity ; especially from that form of it, which some are at this moment laboring to spread through our country ; I mean, that insane, desperate unbelief, which strives to quench the light of nature as well as of revelation, and to leave us, not only without Christ, but without God. This I dread no more, than I should fear the efforts of men to pluck the sun from his sphere, or to storm the skies with the artillery of the earth. We were made for religion ; and unless the enemies of our faith can change our nature, they will leave the foundation of religion unshaken. The human soul was created to look above material nature. It wants a Deity for its love and trust, an Immortality for its hope. It wants consolations not found in philosophy, wants strength in temptation, sorrow, and death, which human wisdom cannot minister ; and knowing, as I do,

that Christianity meets these deep wants of men, I have no fear or doubt as to its triumphs. Men cannot long live without religion. In France there is a spreading dissatisfaction with the skeptical spirit of the past generation. A philosopher in that country would now blush to quote Voltaire as an authority in religion. Already Atheism is dumb where once it seemed to bear sway. The greatest minds in France are working back their way to the light of truth. Many of them indeed cannot yet be called Christians; but their path, like that of the wise men of old who came star-guided from the East, is towards Christ. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. It has an immortal life, and will gather strength from the violence of its foes. It is equal to all the wants of men. The greatest minds have found in it the light which they most anxiously desired. The most sorrowful and broken spirits have found in it a healing balm for their woes. It has inspired the sublimest virtues and the loftiest hopes. For the corruptions of such a religion I weep, and I should blush to be their advocate; but of the Gospel itself I can never be ashamed.

DISCOURSE II.

MATTHEW xvii. 5.

THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL
PLEASED.

THE character of Christ may be studied for various purposes. It is singularly fitted to call forth the heart, to awaken love, admiration, and moral delight. As an example, it has no rival. As an evidence of his religion, perhaps it yields to no other proof; perhaps no other has so often conquered unbelief. It is chiefly to this last view of it, that I now ask your attention. The character of Christ is a strong confirmation of the truth of his religion. As such, I would now place it before you. I shall not, however, think only of confirming your faith; the very illustrations, which I shall adduce for this purpose, will show the claims of Jesus to our reverence, obedience, imitation, and fervent love.

The more we contemplate Christ's character, as exhibited in the Gospel, the more we shall be impressed with its genuineness and reality. It was plainly drawn from *the life*. The narratives of the Evangelists bear

the marks of truth, perhaps beyond all other histories. They set before us the **most** extraordinary being who ever appeared on earth, and yet they are as artless as the stories of childhood. The authors do not think of themselves. They have plainly but one aim, to show us their Master ; and they manifest the deep veneration which he inspired, by leaving him to reveal himself, by giving us his actions and sayings without comment, explanation, or eulogy. You see in these narratives no varnishing, no high coloring, no attempts to make his actions striking, or to bring out the beauties of his character. We are never pointed to any circumstance as illustrative of his greatness. The Evangelists write with a calm trust in his character, with a feeling that it needed no aid from their hands, and with a deep veneration, as if comment or praise of their own were not worthy to mingle with the recital of such a life.


It is the effect of our familiarity with the history of Jesus, that we are not struck by it, as we ought to be. We read it before we are capable of understanding its excellence. His stupendous works become as familiar to us as the events of ordinary life, and his high offices seem as much matters of course, as the common relations which men bear to each other. On this account, it is fit for the ministers of religion to do what the Evangelists did not attempt, to offer comments on Christ's character, to bring out its features, to point men to its higher beauties, to awaken their awe by unfolding its wonderful majesty. Indeed, one of our most important functions, as teachers, is to give *freshness* and vividness to truths which have become *worn*, I had almost said tarnished, by long and famil-

iar handling. We have to fight with the power of habit. Through habit, men look on this glorious creation with insensibility, and are less moved by the all-enlightening sun than by a show of fire-works. It is the duty of a moral and religious teacher, almost to create a new sense in men, that they may learn in what a world of beauty and magnificence they live. And so in regard to Christ's character ; men become used to it, until they imagine, that there is something more admirable in a great man of their own day, a statesman or a conqueror, than in Him, the latchet of whose shoes statesmen and conquerors are not worthy to unloose.

In this discourse, I wish to show that the character of Christ, taken as a whole, is one which could not have entered the thoughts of man, could not have been imagined or feigned ; that it bears every mark of genuineness and truth ; that it ought therefore to be acknowledged as real and of divine original.

It is all-important, my friends, if we would feel the force of this argument, to transport ourselves to the times when Jesus lived. We are very apt to think, that he was moving about in such a city as this, or among a people agreeing with ourselves in modes of thinking and habits of life. But the truth is, he lived in a state of society singularly remote from our own. Of all nations, the Jewish was the most strongly marked. The Jew hardly felt himself to belong to the human family. He was accustomed to speak of himself as chosen by God, holy, clean ; whilst the Gentiles were sinners, dogs, polluted, unclean. His common

dress, the phylactery on his brow or arm, the hem of his garment, his food, the ordinary circumstances of his life, as well as his temple, his sacrifices, his ablutions, all held him up to himself, as a peculiar favorite of God, and all separated him from the rest of the world. With other nations he could not eat or marry. They were unworthy of his communion. Still, with all these notions of superiority, he saw himself conquered by those whom he despised. He was obliged to wear the shackles of Rome, to see Roman legions in his territory, a Roman guard near his temple, and a Roman tax-gatherer extorting, for the support of an idolatrous government and an idolatrous worship, what he regarded as due only to God. The hatred which burned in the breast of the Jew towards his foreign oppressor perhaps never glowed with equal intenseness in any other conquered state. He had, however, his secret consolation. The time was near, the prophetic age was at hand, when Judea was to break her chains and rise from the dust. Her long promised king and deliverer was near, and was coming to wear the crown of universal empire. From Jerusalem was to go forth his law, and all nations were to serve the chosen people of God. To this conqueror the Jews indeed ascribed the office of promoting religion; but the religion of Moses, corrupted into an outward service, was to them the perfection of human nature. They clung to its forms with the whole energy of their souls. To the Mosaic institution, they ascribed their distinction from all other nations. It lay at the foundation of their *hopes of dominion*. I believe no strength of prejudice ever equalled the intense attachment of the




Jew to his peculiar national religion. You may judge of its power by the fact of its having been transmitted through so many ages, amidst persecution and sufferings which would have subdued any spirit but that of a Jew. You must bring these things to your mind. You must place yourselves in the midst of this singular people.

Among this singular people, burning with impatient expectation, appeared Jesus of Nazareth. His first words were "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." These words we hear with little emotion; but to the Jews, who had been watching for this kingdom for ages, and who were looking for its immediate manifestation, they must have been awakening as an earthquake. Accordingly we find Jesus thronged by multitudes which no building could contain. He repairs to a mountain, as affording him advantages for addressing the crowd. I see them surrounding him with eager looks, and ready to drink in every word from his lips. And what do I hear? Not one word of Judea, of Rome, of freedom, of conquest, of the glories of God's chosen people, and of the thronging of all nations to the temple on Mount Zion. Almost every word was a death-blow to the hopes and feelings, which glowed through the whole people, and were consecrated under the name of religion. He speaks of the long-expected Kingdom of Heaven; but speaks of it as a felicity promised to, and only to be partaken by, the humble and pure in heart. The righteousness of the Pharisees, that which was deemed the perfection of religion, and which the new deliverer was expected to spread far and wide, he pronounces worthless, and declares the *kingdom of Heaven, or of the Messiah, to be shut against*

all who do not cultivate a new, spiritual, and disinterested virtue. Instead of war and victory, he commands his impatient hearers to love, to forgive, to bless their enemies ; and holds forth this spirit of benignity, mercy, peace, as the special badge of the people of the true Messiah. Instead of national interests and glories, he commands them to seek first a spirit of impartial charity and love, unconfined by the bounds of tribe or nation, and proclaims this to be the happiness and honor of the reign for which they hoped. Instead of this world's riches which they expected to flow from all lands into their own, he commands them to lay up treasures in heaven, and directs them to an incorruptible, immortal life, as the true end of their being. Nor is this all. He does not merely offer himself as a spiritual deliverer, as the founder of a new empire of inward piety and universal charity ; he closes with language announcing a more mysterious office. " Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name ? and in thy name done many wonderful works ? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you ; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." Here I meet the annunciation of a character as august as it must have been startling. I hear him foretelling a dominion to be exercised in the future world. He begins to announce, what entered largely into his future teaching, that his power was not bounded to this earth. These words I better understand, when I hear him subsequently declaring, that, after a painful death, he was to rise again and ascend to heaven, and there, in a state of preëminent power and *glory, was to be the advocate and judge of the human race.*

Such are some of the views, given by Jesus, of his character and reign, in the Sermon on the Mount. Immediately afterwards, I hear another lesson from him, bringing out some of these truths still more strongly. A Roman centurion makes application to him for the cure of a servant, whom he particularly valued ; and on expressing, in a strong manner, his conviction of the power of Jesus to heal at a distance, Jesus, according to the historian, “ marvelled, and said to those that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith in Israel ; and I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ; but the children of the kingdom ” (that is, the Jews) “ shall be cast out.” Here all the hopes which the Jews had cherished of an exclusive or peculiar possession of the Messiah’s kingdom, were crushed ; and the reception of the despised Gentile world to all his blessings, or in other words, the extension of his pure religion to the ends of the earth, began to be proclaimed.

Here I pause for the present, and I ask you, whether the character of Jesus be not the most extraordinary in history, and wholly inexplicable on human principles. Review the ground over which we have gone. Recollect that he was born and grew up a Jew, in the midst of Jews, a people burning with one passion, and throwing their whole souls into the expectation of a national and earthly deliverer. He grew up among them in poverty, seclusion, and labors, fitted to contract his thoughts, purposes, and hopes ; and yet we find him escaping every influence of education



and society. We find him as untouched by the feelings, which prevailed universally around him, which religion and patriotism concurred to consecrate, which the mother breathed into the ear of the child, and which the teacher of the synagogue strengthened in the adult, as if he had been brought up in another world. We find him conceiving a sublime purpose, such as had never dawned on sage or hero, and see him possessed with a consciousness of sustaining a relation to God and mankind, and of being invested with powers in this world and the world to come, such as had never entered the human mind. Whence now, I ask, came the conception of this character ?

Will any say it had its origin in imposture ; that it was a fabrication of a deceiver ? I answer, The character claimed by Christ excludes this supposition, by its very nature. It was so remote from all the ideas and anticipations of the times, so unfit to awaken sympathy, so unattractive to the heathen, so exasperating to the Jew, that it was the last to enter the mind of an impostor. A deceiver of the dullest vision must have foreseen, that it would expose him to bitter scorn, abhorrence, and persecution, and that he would be left to carry on his work alone, just as Jesus always stood alone, and could find not an individual to enter into his spirit and design. What allurements an unprincipled, self-seeking man could find to such an enterprise, no common ingenuity can discover.

I affirm next, that the sublimity of the character claimed by Christ forbids us to trace it to imposture. *That a selfish, designing, depraved mind, could have*

formed the idea and purpose of a work unparalleled in beneficence, in vastness, and in moral grandeur, would certainly be a strange departure from the laws of the human mind. I add, that if an impostor could have lighted on the conception of so sublime and wonderful a work as that claimed by Jesus, he could not, I say, he *could* not have thrown into his personation of it the air of truth and reality. The part would have been too high for him. He would have overacted it or fallen short of it perpetually. His true character would have rebelled against his assumed one. We should have seen something strained, forced, artificial, awkward, showing that he was not in his true sphere. To act up to a character so singular and grand, and one for which no precedent could be found, seems to me utterly impossible for a man, who had not the true spirit of it, or who was only wearing it as a mask.

Now how stands the case with Jesus? Bred a Jewish peasant or carpenter, he issues from obscurity, and claims for himself a divine office, a superhuman dignity, such as had not been imagined; and in no instance does he fall below the character. The peasant, and still more the Jew, wholly disappears. We feel that a new being, of a new order of mind, is taking a part in human affairs. There is a native tone of grandeur and authority in his teaching. He speaks as a being related to the whole human race. His mind never shrinks within the ordinary limits of human agency. A narrower sphere than the world never enters his thoughts. He speaks in a natural, spontaneous style, of accomplishing the most arduous and important *change in human affairs*. This unlabored

manner of expressing great thoughts is particularly worthy of attention. You never hear from Jesus that swelling, pompous, ostentatious language, which almost necessarily springs from an attempt to sustain a character above our powers. He talks of his glories as one to whom they were familiar, and of his intimacy and oneness with God, as simply as a child speaks of his connexion with his parents. He speaks of saving and judging the world, of drawing all men to himself, and of giving everlasting life, as we speak of the ordinary powers which we exert. He makes no set harangues about the grandeur of his office and character. His consciousness of it gives a hue to his whole language, breaks out in indirect, undesigned expressions, showing that it was the deepest and most familiar of his convictions. This argument is only to be understood by reading the Gospels with a wakeful mind and heart. It does not lie on their surface, and it is the stronger for lying beneath it. When I read these books with care, when I trace the unaffected majesty which runs through the life of Jesus, and see him never falling below his sublime claims amidst poverty, and scorn, and in his last agony ; I have a feeling of the reality of his character which I cannot express. I feel that the Jewish carpenter could no more have conceived and sustained this character under motives of imposture, than an infant's arm could repeat the deeds of Hercules, or his unawakened intellect comprehend and rival the matchless works of genius.

Am I told that the claims of Jesus had their origin, not in imposture but in enthusiasm ; that the imagination, kindled by strong feeling, overpowered the judg-

ment so far as to give him the notion of being destined to some strange and unparalleled work? I know that enthusiasm, or a kindled imagination, has great power; and we are never to lose sight of it, in judging of the claims of religious teachers. But I say first, that, except in cases where it amounts to insanity, enthusiasm works, in a greater or less degree, according to a man's previous conceptions and modes of thought. In Judea, where the minds of men were burning with feverish expectation of a Messiah, I can easily conceive of a Jew imagining that in himself this ardent conception, this ideal of glory, was to be realized. I can conceive of his seating himself in fancy on the throne of David, and secretly pondering the means of his appointed triumphs. But that a Jew should fancy himself the Messiah, and at the same time should strip that character of all the attributes which had fired his youthful imagination and heart, — that he should start aside from all the feelings and hopes of his age, and should acquire a consciousness of being destined to a wholly new career, and one as unbounded as it was new, this is exceedingly improbable; and one thing is certain, that an imagination so erratic, so ungoverned, and able to generate the conviction of being destined to a work so immeasurably disproportioned to the power of the individual, must have partaken of insanity. Now is it conceivable, that an individual, mastered by so wild and fervid an imagination, should have sustained the dignity claimed by Christ, should have acted worthily the highest part ever assumed on earth? Would not his *enthusiasm have broken out amidst the peculiar ex-*

citements of the life of Jesus, and have left a touch of madness on his teaching and conduct? Is it to such a man that we should look for the inculcation of a new and perfect form of virtue, and for the exemplification of humanity in its fairest form?

The charge of an extravagant, self-deluding enthusiasm is the last to be fastened on Jesus. Where can we find the traces of it in his history? Do we detect them in the calm authority of his precepts; in the mild, practical, and beneficent spirit of his religion; in the unlabored simplicity of the language with which he unfolds his high powers, and the sublime truths of religion; or in the good sense, the knowledge of human nature, which he always discovers in his estimate and treatment of the different classes of men with whom he acted? Do we discover this enthusiasm in the singular fact, that whilst he claimed power in the future world, and always turned men's minds to Heaven, he never indulged his own imagination, or stimulated that of his disciples, by giving vivid pictures, or any minute description, of that unseen state? The truth is, that, remarkable as was the character of Jesus, it was distinguished by nothing more than by calmness and self-possession. This trait pervades his other excellences. How calm was his piety! Point me, if you can, to one vehement, passionate expression of his religious feelings. Does the Lord's Prayer breathe a feverish enthusiasm? The habitual style of Jesus on the subject of religion, if introduced into many churches of his followers at the present day, would be charged with coldness. The calm and the *rational character* of his piety is particularly seen in

the doctrine which he so earnestly inculcates, that disinterested love and self-denying service to our fellow creatures are the most acceptable worship we can offer to our Creator. His benevolence too, though singularly earnest and deep, was composed and serene. He never lost the possession of himself in his sympathy with others ; was never hurried into the impatient and rash enterprises of an enthusiastic philanthropy ; but did good with the tranquillity and constancy which mark the providence of God. The depth of his calmness may best be understood by considering the opposition made to his claims. His labors were every where insidiously watched and industriously thwarted by vindictive foes, who had even conspired to compass, through his death, the ruin of his cause. Now a feverish enthusiasm, which fancies itself to be entrusted with a great work of God, is singularly liable to impatient indignation under furious and malignant opposition. Obstacles increase its vehemence ; it becomes more eager and hurried in the accomplishment of its purposes, in proportion as they are withstood. Be it therefore remembered, that the malignity of Christ's foes, though never surpassed, and for the time triumphant, never robbed him of self-possession, roused no passion, and threw no vehemence or precipitation into his exertions. He did not disguise from himself or his followers the impression made on the multitude by his adversaries. He distinctly foresaw the violent death towards which he was fast approaching. Yet, confiding in God, and in the silent progress of his truth, he possessed his soul in peace. Not only was he calm, but his calmness rises into sublimity when we

consider the storms which raged around him, and the vastness of the prospects in which his spirit found repose. I say, then, that serenity and self-possession were peculiarly the attributes of Jesus. I affirm, that the singular and sublime character claimed by Jesus, can be traced neither to imposture, nor to an ungoverned, insane imagination. It can only be accounted for by its truth, its reality.

I began with observing how our long familiarity with Jesus blunts our minds to his singular excellence. We probably have often read of the character which he claimed, without a thought of its extraordinary nature. But I know nothing so sublime. The plans and labors of statesmen sink into the sports of children, when compared with the work which Jesus announced, and to which he devoted himself in life and death, with a thorough consciousness of its reality. The idea of changing the moral aspect of the whole earth, of recovering all nations to the pure and inward worship of one God, and to a spirit of divine and fraternal love, was one of which we meet not a trace in philosopher or legislator before him. The human mind had given no promise of this extent of view. The conception of this enterprise, and the calm, unshaken expectation of success, in one who had no station and no wealth, who cast from him the sword with abhorrence, and who forbade his disciples to use any weapons but those of love, discover a wonderful trust in the power of God and the power of love; and when to this we add, that Jesus looked not only to the triumph of his pure *faith* in the present world, but to a mighty and beneficent power in Heaven, we witness a vastness of pur-

pose, a grandeur of thought and feeling, so original, so superior to the workings of all other minds, that nothing but our familiarity can prevent our contemplation of it with wonder and profound awe. I confess, when I can escape the deadening power of habit, and can receive the full import of such passages as the following, — “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,” — “I am come to seek and to save that which was lost,” — “He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father in Heaven,” — “Whosoever shall be ashamed of me before men, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of the Father with the holy angels,” — “In my Father’s house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you:” — I say, when I can succeed in realizing the import of such passages, I feel myself listening to a being, such as never before and never since spoke in human language. I am awed by the consciousness of greatness which these simple words express; and when I connect this greatness with the proofs of Christ’s miracles which I gave you in a former discourse, I am compelled to exclaim with the centurion, “Truly, this was the Son of God.”

I have thus, my friends, set before you one view of Jesus Christ, which shows him to have been the most extraordinary being who ever lived. I invite your attention to another; and I am not sure, but that it is still more striking. You have seen the consciousness of greatness which Jesus possessed; I now ask you to *consider, how, with this consciousness, he lived among*

men. To convey my meaning more distinctly, let me avail myself of an imaginary case. Suppose you had never heard the particulars of Christ's history, but were told in general, that, ages ago, an extraordinary man appeared in the world, whose mind was wholly possessed with the idea of having come from God, who regarded himself as clothed with divine power and charged with the sublimest work in the universe, who had the consciousness of sustaining a relation of unexampled authority and beneficence, not to one nation or age, but to all nations and all times,—and who anticipated a spiritual kingdom and everlasting power beyond the grave. Suppose you should be told, that, on entering the world, he found not one mind able to comprehend his views, and felt himself immeasurably exalted in thought and purpose above all around him, and suppose you should then be asked what appearance, what mode of life, what tone, what air, what deportment, what intercourse with the multitude seemed to you to suit such a character, and were probably adopted by him; how would you represent him to your minds? Would you not suppose, that, with this peculiar character, he adopted some peculiar mode of life, expressive of his superiority to and separation from all other men? Would you not expect something distinctive in his appearance? Would you not expect him to assume some badge, and to exact some homage? Would you not expect, that, with a mind revolving such vast thoughts and raised above the earth, he would look coldly on the ordinary gratifications of men? that, with a mind spreading *itself over the world*, and meditating its subjection to

his truth, he would take little interest in ordinary individuals? and that, possessing, in his own doctrine and character, a standard of sublime virtue, he would attach little importance to the low attainments of the ignorant and superstitious around him? Would you not make him a public character, and expect to see him laboring to establish his ascendancy among public men? Would you not expect to see his natural affections absorbed in his universal philanthropy; and would not private attachments seem to you quite inconsistent with his vast superiority, and the immensity of his purposes? Would you not expect him to avail himself of the best accommodations the world could afford? Would you not expect the great Teacher to select the most sacred spots for his teaching, and the Lord of all to erect some conspicuous seat, from which should go forth the laws which were to reach the ends of the earth? Would you not, in a word, expect this extraordinary personage to surround himself with extraordinary circumstances, and to maintain a separation from the degraded multitude around him?

Such, I believe, would be the expectation of us all; and what was the case with Jesus? Read his history. He comes with the consciousness of more than human greatness, to accomplish an infinite work; and where do you find him? What is his look? what his manner? How does he converse, how live with men? His appearance, mode of life, and intercourse are directly the reverse of what we should have supposed. He comes in the ordinary dress of the class of society in which he had grown up. He retreats to no solitude, *like John, to strike awe, nor seeks any spot which*

had been consecrated in Jewish history. Would you find him? Go to the house of Peter, the fisherman. Go to the well of Samaria, where he rests after the fatigues of his journey. Would you hear him teach? You may find him, indeed, sometimes in the temple, for that was a place of general resort; but commonly you may find him instructing in the open air, now from a boat on the Galilean lake, now on a mount, and now in the streets of the crowded city. He has no place wherein to lay his head, nor will he have one. A rich ruler comes and falls at his feet. He says, "Go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and then come and follow me." Nor was this all. Something more striking remains to be told. He did not merely live in the streets, and in the houses of fishermen. In these places, had he pleased, he might have cleared a space around him, and raised a barrier between himself and others. But in these places, and every where, he lived with men as a man, a brother, a friend, sometimes a servant; and entered, with a deep, unexampl'd sympathy, into the feelings, interests, wants, sorrows of individuals, of ordinary men, and even of the most depressed, despised, and forsaken of the race. Here is the most striking view of Jesus. This combination of the spirit of humanity, in its lowliest, tenderest form, with the consciousness of unrivalled and divine glories, is the most wonderful distinction of this wonderful character. Here we learn the chief reason, why he chose poverty, and refused every peculiarity of manner and appearance. He did this because he desired to come near to the multitude of *men, to make himself accessible to all, to pour out the*

fullness of his sympathy upon all, to know and weep over their sorrows and sins, and to manifest his interest in their affections and joys.

I can offer but a few instances of this sympathy of Christ with human nature in all its varieties of character and condition. But how beautiful are they ! At the very opening of his ministry, we find him present at a marriage, to which he and his disciples had been called. Among the Jews this was an occasion of peculiar exhilaration and festivity ; but Jesus did not therefore decline it. He knew what affections, joys, sorrows, and moral influences are bound up in this institution, and he went to the celebration, not as an ascetic, to frown on its bright hopes and warm congratulations, but to sanction it by his presence, and to heighten its enjoyments. How little does this comport with the solitary dignity, which we should have pronounced most accordant with his character ; and what a spirit of humanity does it breathe ! But this event stands almost alone in his history. His chief sympathy was not with them that rejoice, but with the ignorant, sinful, sorrowful ; and with these we find him cultivating an habitual intimacy. Though so exalted in thought and purpose, he chose uneducated men to be his chief disciples ; and he lived with them, not as a superior, giving occasional and formal instruction, but became their companion, travelled with them on foot, slept in their dwellings, sat at their tables, partook their plain fare, communicated to them his truth in the simplest form ; and though they constantly misunderstood him, and never received his full meaning, he was never wearied with teaching *them*. *So familiar* was his intercourse, that we find

Peter reproving him with an affectionate zeal, for announcing his approaching death, and we find John leaning on his bosom. Of his last discourse to these disciples I need not speak. It stands alone among all writings for the union of tenderness and majesty. His own sorrows are forgotten in his solicitude to speak peace and comfort to his humble followers.

The depth of his human sympathies was beautifully manifested when children were brought to him. His disciples, judging as all men would judge, thought that he who was sent to wear the crown of universal empire, had too great a work before him to give his time and attention to children, and reproved the parents who brought them ; but Jesus, rebuking his disciples, called to him the children. Never, I believe, did childhood awaken such deep love as at that moment. He took them in his arms and blessed them, and not only said that "of such was the kingdom of heaven," but added, "He that receiveth a little child in my name, receiveth me ;" so entirely did he identify himself with this primitive, innocent, beautiful form of human nature.

There was no class of human beings so low as to be beneath his sympathy. He not merely taught the publican and sinner, but, with all his consciousness of purity, sat down and dined with them, and, when reproved by the malignant Pharisee for such companionship, answered by the touching parables of the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son, and said, "I am come to seek and to save that which was lost."

No personal suffering dried up this fountain of love in his breast. On his way to the cross, he heard *some women of Jerusalem* bewailing him, and at the

sound, forgetting his own grief, he turned to them and said, "Women of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and your children."—On the cross, whilst his mind was divided between intense suffering, and the contemplation of the infinite blessings in which his sufferings were to issue, his eye lighted on his mother and John, and the sensibilities of a son and a friend mingled with the sublime consciousness of the universal Lord and Saviour. Never before did natural affection find so tender and beautiful an utterance. To his mother he said, directing her to John, "*Behold thy son*; I leave my beloved disciple to take my place, to perform my filial offices, and to enjoy a share of that affection with which you have followed me through life;" and to John he said, "*Behold thy mother*; I bequeath to you the happiness of ministering to my dearest earthly friend." Nor is this all. The spirit of humanity had one higher triumph. Whilst his enemies surrounded him with a malignity unsoftened by his last agonies, and, to give the keenest edge to insult, reminded him scoffingly of the high character and office which he had claimed, his only notice of them was the prayer, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."


Thus Jesus lived with men; with the consciousness of unutterable majesty, he joined a lowliness, gentleness, humanity, and sympathy, which have no example in human history. I ask you to contemplate this wonderful union. In proportion to the superiority of Jesus to all around him was the intimacy, the brotherly love, with which he bound himself to them. *I maintain, that this is a character wholly remote from*

human conception. To imagine it to be the production of imposture or enthusiasm, shows a strange unsoundness of mind. I contemplate it with a veneration second only to the profound awe with which I look up to God. It bears no mark of human invention. It was real. It belonged to and it manifested the beloved Son of God.

But I have not done. May I ask your attention a few moments more? We have not yet reached the depth of Christ's character. We have not touched the great principle, on which his wonderful sympathy was founded, and which endeared to him his office of universal Saviour. Do you ask what this deep principle was? I answer, It was his conviction of the greatness of the human soul. He saw in man the impress and image of the divinity, and therefore thirsted for his redemption, and took the tenderest interest in him, whatever might be the rank, character, or condition in which he was found. This spiritual view of man pervades and distinguishes the teaching of Christ. Jesus looked on men with an eye which pierced beneath the material frame. The body vanished before him. The trappings of the rich, the rags of the poor, were nothing to him. He looked through them, as though they did not exist, to the soul; and there, amidst clouds of ignorance and plague-spots of sin, he recognised a spiritual and immortal nature, and the germs of power and perfection which might be unfolded for ever. In the most fallen and depraved man, *he saw* a being who might become an angel of light. *Still more, he felt* that there was nothing in himself

to which men might not ascend. His own lofty consciousness did not sever him from the multitude ; for he saw in his own greatness the model of what men might become. So deeply was he thus impressed, that again and again, in speaking of his future glories, he announced, that in these his true followers were to share. They were to sit on his throne, and partake of his beneficent power.

Here I pause, and indeed I know not what can be added to heighten the wonder, reverence, and love, which are due to Jesus. When I consider him, not only as possessed with the consciousness of an unexampled and unbounded majesty, but as recognising a kindred nature in all human beings, and living and dying to raise them to a participation of his divine glories ; and when I see him under these views allying himself to men by the tenderest ties, embracing them with a spirit of humanity, which no insult, injury, or pain could for a moment repel or overpower, I am filled with wonder as well as reverence and love. I feel that this character is not of human invention, that it was not assumed through fraud, or struck out by enthusiasm ; for it is infinitely above their reach. When I add this character of Jesus to the other evidences of his religion, it gives to what before seemed so strong, a new and a vast accession of strength ; I feel as if I could not be deceived. The Gospels must be true ; they were drawn from a living original ; they were founded on reality. The character of Jesus is not a fiction ; he was what he claimed to be, and what his followers attested. Nor is this all. Jesus not only *was*, *he is still*, the Son of God, the Saviour of



the world. He exists now ; he has entered that
en, to which he always looked forward on
There he lives and reigns. With a clear, calm
I see him in that state of glory ; and I confi
expect, at no distant period, to see him face to
We have indeed no absent friend whom we sh
surely meet. Let us then, my hearers, by im
of his virtues and obedience to his word, prepar
selves to join him in those pure mansions, whe
is surrounding himself with the good and pure
race, and will communicate to them for ever his
spirit, power, and joy.

DISCOURSE III.

ROMANS i. 16.

I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

SUCH was the language of Paul ; and every man will respond to it, who comprehends the character and has felt the influence of Christianity. In a former discourse, I proposed to state to you some reasons for adopting as our own the words of the Apostle, for joining in this open and resolute testimony to the gospel of Christ. I observed, that I was not ashamed of the gospel, first because it is True, and to this topic the discourse was devoted. I wish now to continue the subject and to state another ground of undisguised and unshaken adherence to Christianity. I say, then, I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is a *rational* religion. It agrees with Reason ; therefore I count it worthy of acceptation, therefore I do not blush to enroll myself among its friends and advocates. The object of the present discourse will be the illustration of this claim of Christianity. I wish to show you the harmony which subsists between the light of God's word, and that primitive light

of reason, which he has kindled within us to be our perpetual guide. If, in treating this subject, I shall come into conflict with any class of Christians, I trust I shall not be considered as imputing to them any moral or intellectual defect. I judge men by their motives, dispositions, and lives, and not by their speculations or peculiar opinions; and I esteem piety and virtue equally venerable, whether found in friend or foe.

Christianity is a Rational religion. Were it not so, I should be ashamed to profess it. I am aware that it is the fashion with some to decry reason, and to set up revelation as an opposite authority. This error though countenanced by good men, and honestly maintained for the defence of the Christian cause, ought to be earnestly withstood; for it virtually surrenders our religion into the hands of the unbeliever. It saps the foundation to strengthen the building. It places our religion in hostility to human nature, and gives to its adversaries the credit of vindicating the rights and noblest powers of the mind.

We must never forget that our rational nature is the greatest gift of God. For this we owe him our chief gratitude. It is a greater gift than any outward aid or benefaction, and no doctrine which degrades it can come from its Author. The developement of it is the end of our being. Revelation is but a means, and is designed to concur with nature, providence, and God's spirit in carrying forward reason to its perfection. I glory in Christianity because it enlarges, invigorates, *exalts my* rational nature. If I could not be a *Christian without ceasing* to be rational, I should not hesi-

tate as to my choice. I feel myself bound to sacrifice to Christianity property, reputation, life ; but I ought not to sacrifice to any religion, that reason which lifts me above the brute and constitutes me a man. I can conceive no sacrilege greater than to prostrate or renounce the highest faculty which we have derived from God. In so doing we should offer violence to the divinity within us. Christianity wages no war with reason, but is one with it, and is given to be its helper and friend.

I wish, in the present discourse, to illustrate and confirm the views now given. My remarks will be arranged under two heads. I propose, first, to show that Christianity is founded on, and supposes the authority of reason, and cannot therefore oppose it without subverting itself. My object in this part of the discourse will be to expose the error of those who hope to serve revelation by disparaging reason. I shall then, in the second place, compare Christianity and the light of reason, to show their accordance ; and shall prove, by descending to particulars, that Christianity is eminently a rational religion. My aim, under this head, will be to vindicate the gospel from the reproaches of the unbeliever, and to strengthen the faith and attachment of its friends. — Before I begin, let me observe that this discussion, from the nature of the subject, must assume occasionally an abstract form and will demand serious attention. I am to speak of Reason, the chief faculty of the mind ; and no simplicity of language in treating such a topic can exempt the hearer from the necessity of a patient effort of thought.

I am to begin with showing that the Christian revelation is founded on the authority of reason, and consequently cannot oppose it; and here it may be proper to settle the meaning of the word Reason. One of the most important steps towards the truth is to determine the import of terms. Very often fierce controversies have sprung from obscurity of language, and the parties, on explaining themselves, have discovered that they have been spending their strength in a war of words. What then is reason?

The term Reason is used with so much latitude, that to fix its precise limits is not an easy task. In this respect it agrees with the other words which express the intellectual faculties. One idea, however, is always attached to it. All men understand by reason the highest faculty or energy of the mind. Without laboring for a philosophical definition that will comprehend all its exercises, I shall satisfy myself with pointing out two of its principal characteristics or functions.

First, it belongs to reason to comprehend Universal truths. This is among its most important offices. There are particular and there are universal truths. The last are the noblest, and the capacity of perceiving them is the distinction of intelligent beings; and these belong to reason. Let me give my meaning by some illustrations. I see a stone falling to the ground. This is a particular truth; but I do not stop here. I believe that not only this particular stone falls towards the earth, but that every particle of matter, in whatever world, tends, or, as is sometimes said, is attracted towards all other matter. Here is a universal truth, a principle extend-

ing to the whole material creation, and essential to its existence. This truth belongs to reason. — Again, I see a man producing some effect, a manufacture, a house. Here is a particular truth. But I am not only capable of seeing particular causes and effects; I am sure that every thing which begins to exist, no matter when or where, must have a cause, that no change ever has taken place or ever will take place without a cause. Here is a universal truth, something true here and every where, true now and through eternity; and this truth belongs to reason. — Again, I see with my eyes, I traverse with my hands, a limited space; but this is not all. I am sure, that, beyond the limits which my limbs or senses reach, there is an unbounded space; that, go where I will, an infinity will spread around me. Here is another universal truth, and this belongs to reason. The idea of Infinity is indeed one of the noblest conceptions of this faculty. — Again, I see a man conferring a good on another. Here is a particular truth or perception. But my mind is not confined to this. I see and feel that it is right for all intelligent beings, exist when or where they may, to do good, and wrong for them to seek the misery of others. Here is a universal truth, a law extending from God to the lowest human being; and this belongs to reason. I trust I have conveyed to you my views in regard to the first characteristic of this highest power of the soul. Its office is to discern universal truths, great and eternal principles. But it does not stop here. Reason is also exercised in applying these universal truths to particular cases, beings, events. For example, *reason teaches me, as we have seen, that all*


changes without exception require a cause ; and in conformity to this principle, it prompts me to seek the particular causes of the endless changes and appearances which fall under my observation. Thus reason is perpetually at work on the ideas furnished us by the senses, by consciousness, by memory, associating them with its own great truths, or investing them with its own universality.

I now proceed to the second function of reason, which is indeed akin to the first. Reason is the power which tends, and is perpetually striving, to reduce our various thoughts to Unity or Consistency. Perhaps the most fundamental conviction of reason is, that all truths agree together ; that inconsistency is the mark of error. Its intensest, most earnest effort is to bring concord into the intellect, to reconcile what seem to be clashing views. On the observation of a new fact, reason strives to incorporate it with former knowledge. It can allow nothing to stand separate in the mind. It labors to bring together scattered truths, and to give them the strength and beauty of a vital order. Its end and delight is harmony. It is shocked by an inconsistency in belief, just as a fine ear is wounded by a discord. It carries within itself an instinctive consciousness, that all things which exist are intimately bound together ; and it cannot rest until it has connected whatever we witness with the infinite whole. Reason, according to this view, is the most glorious form or exercise of the intellectual nature. It corresponds to the unity of God and the universe, and seeks to make the soul the image and mirror of this sublime unity.

I have thus given my views of reason ; but, to prevent all perversion, before I proceed to the main discussion, let me offer a word or two more of explanation. In this discourse, when I speak of the accordance of revelation with reason, I suppose this faculty to be used deliberately, conscientiously, and with the love of truth. Men often baptize with the name of reason their prejudices, unexamined notions, or opinions adopted through interest, pride, or other unworthy biasses. It is not uncommon to hear those who sacrifice the plainest dictates of the rational nature to impulse and passion, setting themselves up as oracles of reason. Now when I say revelation must accord with reason, I do not mean by the term the corrupt and superficial opinions of men who have betrayed and debased their rational powers. I mean reason, calmly, honestly exercised for the acquisition of truth and the invigoration of virtue.

After these explanations I proceed to the discussion of the two leading principles to which this Discourse is devoted.

First, I am to show that revelation is founded on the authority of reason, and cannot therefore oppose or disparage it without subverting itself. Let me state a few of the considerations which convince me of the truth of this position. The first is, that reason alone makes us capable of receiving a revelation. It must previously exist and operate, or we should be wholly unprepared for the communications of Christ. Revelation then is built on reason. You will see the truth of *these remarks if you will consider to whom revelation*



is sent. Why is it given to men rather than to brutes ? Why have not God's messengers gone to the fields to proclaim his glad tidings to bird and beast ? The answer is obvious. These want reason ; and, wanting this, they have no capacity or preparation for revealed truth. And not only would revelation be lost on the brute ; let it speak to the child, before his rational faculties have been awakened, and before some ideas of duty and his own nature have been developed, and it might as well speak to a stone. Reason is the preparation and ground of revelation.

This truth will be still more obvious, if we consider, not only to whom, but in what way, the Christian revelation is communicated. How is it conveyed ? In words. Did it make these words ? No. They were in use ages before its birth. Again I ask, Did it make the ideas or thoughts which these words express ? No. If the hearers of Jesus had not previously attached ideas to the terms which he employed, they could not have received his meaning. He might as well have spoken to them in a foreign tongue. Thus the ideas which enter into Christianity subsisted before. They were ideas of reason ; so that to this faculty revelation owes the materials of which it is composed.

Revelation we must remember is not our earliest teacher. Man is not born with the single power of reading God's word, and sent immediately to that guide. His eyes open first on another volume, that of the creation. Long before he can read the Bible, he looks round on the earth and sky. He reads the countenances of his friends, and hears and understands *their voices*. He looks, too, by degrees within himself

and acquires some ideas of his own soul. Thus his first school is that of nature and reason, and this is necessary to prepare him for a communication from Heaven. Revelation does not find the mind a blank, a void, prepared to receive unresistingly whatever may be offered ; but finds it in possession of various knowledge from nature and experience, and, still more, in possession of great principles, fundamental truths, moral ideas, which are derived from itself, and which are the germs of all its future improvement. This last view is peculiarly important. The mind does not receive every thing from abroad. Its great ideas arise from itself, and by those native lights it reads and comprehends the volumes of nature and revelation. We speak, indeed, of nature and revelation as making known to us an intelligent first cause ; but the ideas of intelligence and causation we derive originally from our own nature. The elements of the idea of God we gather from ourselves. Power, wisdom, love, virtue, beauty, and happiness, words which contain all that is glorious in the universe and interesting in our existence, express attributes of the mind, and are understood by us only through consciousness. It is true, these ideas or principles of reason are often obscured by thick clouds, and mingled with many and deplorable errors. Still they are never lost. Christianity recognises them, is built on them, and needs them as its interpreters. If an illustration of these views be required, I would point you to what may be called the most fundamental idea of religion. I mean the idea of right, of duty. Do we derive this originally and wholly from sacred books ? *Has not every human being, whether born within or*

beyond the bounds of revelation, a sense of the distinction between right and wrong? Is there not an earlier voice than revelation, approving or rebuking men according to their deeds? In barbarous ages is not conscience heard? And does it not grow more articulate with the progress of society? Christianity does not create, but presupposes the idea of duty; and the same may be said of other great convictions. Revelation then does not stand alone, nor is it addressed to a blank and passive mind. It was meant to be a joint worker with other teachers, with nature, with Providence, with conscience, with our rational powers; and as these all are given us by God, they cannot differ from each other. God must agree with himself. He has but one voice. It is man who speaks with jarring tongues. Nothing but harmony can come from the Creator; and accordingly a religion claiming to be from God can give no surer proof of falsehood, than by contradicting those previous truths which God is teaching by our very nature. We have thus seen that reason prepares us for a divine communication, and that it furnishes the ideas or materials of which revelation consists. This is my first consideration.

I proceed to a second. I affirm, then, that revelation rests on the authority of reason, because to this faculty it submits the evidences of its truth, and nothing but the approving sentence of reason binds us to receive and obey it. This is a very weighty consideration. Christianity, in placing itself before the tribunal of reason and in resting its claims on the sanction of this faculty, is one of the chief witnesses to the authority and *dignity of our rational nature*. That I have ascribed to

this faculty its true and proper office, may be easily made to appear. I take the New Testament in hand, and on what ground do I receive its truths as divine? I see nothing on its pages but the same letters in which other books are written. No miraculous voice from Heaven assures me that it is God's word, nor does any mysterious voice within my soul command me to believe the supernatural works of Christ. How then shall I settle the question of the origin of this religion? I must examine it by the same rational faculties by which other subjects are tried. I must ask what are its evidences, and I must lay them before reason, the only power by which evidence can be weighed. I have not a distinct faculty given me for judging a revelation. I have not two understandings, one for inquiring into God's word and another into his works. As with the same bodily eye I now look on the earth, now on the heavens, so with the same power of reason I examine now nature, now revelation. Reason must collect and weigh the various proofs of Christianity. It must especially compare this system with those great moral convictions, which are written by the finger of God on the heart, and which make man a law to himself. A religion subverting these, it must not hesitate to reject, be its evidences what they may. A religion, for example, commanding us to hate and injure society, reason must instantly discard, without even waiting to examine its proofs. From these views we learn, not only that it is the province of reason to judge of the truth of Christianity, but, what is still more important, that the rules or tests by which it judges are of its own dictation. *The laws which it applies in this case have their origin*

in itself. No one will pretend, that revelation can prescribe the principles by which the question of its own truth should be settled ; for, until proved to be true, it has no authority. Reason must prescribe the tests or standards, to which a professed communication from God should be referred ; and among these none are more important than that moral law, which belongs to the very essence, and is the deepest conviction, of the rational nature. Revelation then rests on reason, and, in opposing it, would act for its own destruction.

I have given two views. I have shown that revelation draws its ideas or materials from reason, and that it appeals to this power as the judge of its truth. I now assert, thirdly, that it rests on the authority of reason, because it needs and expects this faculty to be its interpreter, and without this aid would be worse than useless. How is the right interpretation, the real meaning, of the Scriptures to be ascertained ? I answer, By reason. I know of no process by which the true sense of the New Testament is to pass from the page into my mind without the use of my rational faculties. It will not be pretended that this book is so exceedingly plain, its words so easy, its sentences so short, its meaning so exposed on the surface, that the whole truth may be received in a moment and without any intellectual effort. There is no such miraculous simplicity in the Scriptures. In truth, no book can be written so simply as to need no exercise of reason. Almost every word has more than one meaning, and judgment is required to select the particular sense intended by the writer. Of all books, perhaps the Scriptures need most *the use of reason* for their just interpretation ; and this,

not from any imperfection, but from the strength, boldness, and figurative character of their style, and from the distance of the time when they were written. I open the New Testament and my eye lights on this passage : “If thy hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee.” Is this language to be interpreted in its plainest and most obvious sense? Then I must mutilate my body, and become a suicide. I look again, and I find Jesus using these words to the Jews: “Fill ye up the measure of your iniquities.” Am I to interpret this according to the letter, or the first ideas which it suggests? Then Jesus commanded his hearers to steep themselves in crime, and was himself a minister of sin. It is only by a deliberate use of reason, that we can penetrate beneath the figurative, hyperbolic, and often obscure style of the New Testament, to the real meaning. Let me go to the Bible, dismissing my reason and taking the first impression which the words convey, and there is no absurdity, however gross, into which I shall not fall. I shall ascribe a limited body to God and unbounded knowledge to man, for I read of God having limbs and of man knowing all things. Nothing is plainer, than that I must compare passage with passage, and limit one by another, and especially limit all by those plain and universal principles of reason, which are called common-sense, or I shall make revelation the patron of every folly and vice. So essential is reason to the interpretation of the Christian records. Revelation rests upon its authority. Can it then oppose it, or teach us to hold it in light esteem?

I have now furnished the proofs of my first position, that revelation is founded on reason ; and in discussing this I have wished not only to support the main doctrine, but to teach you to reverence, more perhaps than you have done, your rational nature. This has been decried by theologians, until men have ceased to feel its sacredness and dignity. It ought to be regarded as God's greatest gift. It is his image within us. To renounce it would be to offer a cruel violence to ourselves, to take our place among the brutes. Better pluck out the eye, better quench the light of the body, than the light within us. We all feel, that the loss of reason, when produced by disease, is the most terrible calamity of life, and we look on a hospital for the insane as the receptacle of the most pitiable of our race. But, in one view, insanity is not so great an evil as the prostration of reason to a religious sect or a religious chief ; for the first is a visitation of Providence, the last is a voluntary act, the work of our own hands.

I am aware that those, who have spoken most contemptuously of human reason, have acted from a good motive ; their aim has been to exalt revelation. They have thought that by magnifying this as the only means of divine teaching, they were adding to its dignity. But truth gains nothing by exaggeration ; and Christianity, as we have seen, is undermined by nothing more effectually, than by the sophistry which would bring discredit on our rational powers. Revelation needs no such support. For myself I do not find, that, to esteem Christianity, I must think it the only *source of instruction* to which I must repair. I need

not make nature dumb, to give power or attraction to the teaching of Christ. The last derives new interest and confirmation from its harmony with the first. Christianity would furnish a weapon against itself, not easily repelled, should it claim the distinction of being the only light vouchsafed by God to men ; for, in that case, it would represent a vast majority of the human race as left by their Creator without guidance or hope. I believe, and rejoice to believe, that a ray from Heaven descends on the path of every fellow creature. The heathen, though in darkness when compared with the Christian, has still his light ; and it comes from the same source as our own, just as the same sun dispenses, now the faint dawn, and now the perfect day. Let not nature's teaching be disparaged. It is from God as truly as his word. It is sacred, as truly as revelation. Both are manifestations of one infinite mind, and harmonious manifestations ; and without this agreement the claims of Christianity could not be sustained.

In offering these remarks, I have not forgotten that they will expose me to the reproach of ministering to "the pride of reason" ; and I may be told, that there is no worse form of pride than this. The charge is so common, as to deserve a moment's attention. It will appear at once to be groundless, if you consider, that pride finds its chief nourishment and delight in the idea of our own superiority. It is built on something peculiar and distinctive, on something which separates us from others and raises us above them, and not on powers which we share with all around us. Now in speaking, as I have done, of the worth and dignity of reason, I *have constantly regarded and represented this faculty*

as the common property of all human beings. I have spoken of its most important truths as universal and unconfined, such as no individual can monopolize or make the grounds of personal distinction or elevation. I have given, then, no occasion and furnished no nutriment to pride. I know, indeed, that the pride of reason or of intellect exists ; but how does it chiefly manifest itself? Not in revering that rational nature, which all men have derived from God ; but in exaggerating our particular acquisitions or powers, in magnifying our distinctive views, in looking contemptuously on other minds, in making ourselves standards for our brethren, in refusing new lights, and in attempting to establish dominion over the understandings of those who are placed within our influence. Such is the most common form of the pride of intellect. It is a vice confined to no sect, and perhaps will be found to prevail most where it is most disclaimed.

I doubt not that they who insist so continually on the duty of exalting Scripture above reason, consider themselves as particularly secured against the pride of reason. Yet none, I apprehend, are more open to the charge. Such persons are singularly prone to enforce their own interpretations of Scripture on others, and to see peril and crime in the adoption of different views from their own. Now, let me ask, by what power do these men interpret revelation? Is it not by their reason? Have they any faculties but the rational ones, by which to compare Scripture with Scripture, to explain figurative language, to form conclusions as to the will of God? Do they not employ on God's word the same *intellect as on his works*? And are not their interpre-

tations of both equally results of reason? It follows, that in imposing on others their explications of the Scriptures, they as truly arrogate to themselves a superiority of reason, as if they should require conformity to their explanations of nature. Nature and Scripture agree in this, that they cannot be understood at a glance. Both volumes demand patient investigation, and task all our powers of thought. Accordingly it is well known, that as much intellectual toil has been spent on theological systems as on the natural sciences; and unhappily it is not less known, that as much intellectual pride has been manifested in framing and defending the first as the last. I fear, indeed, that this vice has clung with peculiar obstinacy to the students of revelation. No where, I fear, have men manifested such infatuated trust in their own infallibility, such overweening fondness for their own conclusions, such positiveness, such impatience of contradiction, such arrogance towards the advocates of different opinions, as in the interpretation of the Scriptures; and yet these very men, who so idolize their own intellectual powers, profess to humble reason, and consider a criminal reliance on it as almost exclusively chargeable on others. The true defence against the pride of reason, is, not to speak of it contemptuously, but to reverence it as God's inestimable gift to every human being, and as given to all for never-ceasing improvements, of which we see but the dawn in the present acquisitions of the noblest mind.

I have now completed my views of the first principle, which I laid down in this discourse; namely, *that the Christian revelation rests on the authority of*

reason. Of course, it cannot oppose reason without undermining and destroying itself. I maintain, however, that it does not oppose, that it perfectly accords with reason. It is a rational religion. This is my second great position, and to this I ask your continued attention. This topic might easily be extended to a great length. I might state in succession, all the principles of Christianity and show their accordance with reason. But I believe that more general views will be more useful, and such only can be given within the compass of a discourse.

In the account which I gave you of reason in the beginning of this discourse, I confined myself to two of its functions, namely, its comprehension of universal truths, and the effort it constantly makes to reduce the thoughts to harmony or consistency. Universality and Consistency are among the chief attributes of reason. Do we find these in Christianity? If so, its claim to the character of a rational religion will be established. These tests I will therefore apply to it, and I will begin with Consistency.

That a religion be rational, nothing more is necessary than that its truths should consist or agree with one another, and with all other truths, whether derived from outward nature, or our own souls. Now I affirm, that the Christian doctrines have this agreement ; and the more we examine, the more brightly this mark of truth will appear. I go to the gospel, and I first compare its various parts with one another. Among these I find perfect harmony ; and what makes this more remarkable is, that Christianity is not taught systematically, or like *a science*. Jesus threw out, if I may so speak, his

precepts and doctrines incidentally, or as they were required by the occasion, and yet, when they are brought together, they form a harmonious whole. I do not think it necessary to enlarge on this topic, because I believe it is not questioned by infidelity. I will name but one example of this harmony in Christianity. All its doctrines and all its precepts have that species of unity, which is most essential in a religion, that is, they all tend to one object. They all agree in a single aim or purpose, and that is to exalt the human character to a height of virtue never known before. Let the skeptic name, if he can, one Christian principle which has not a bearing on this end. A consistency of this kind is the strongest mark of a rational religion which can be conceived. Let me observe, in passing, that, besides this harmony of the Christian doctrines with one another, there is a striking and beautiful agreement between the teachings of Jesus and his character, which gives confirmation to both. Whatever Jesus taught, you may see embodied in himself. There is perfect unity between the system and its Founder. His life republished what fell from his lips. With his lips he enjoined earnestly, constantly a strong and disinterested philanthropy ; and how harmoniously and sublimely did his cross join with his word in enforcing this exalted virtue. With his lips he taught the mercy of God to sinners ; and of this attribute he gave a beautiful illustration in his own deep interest in the sinful, in his free intercourse with the most fallen, and in his patient efforts to recover them to virtue and to filial reliance on their Father in Heaven. *So, his preaching turned much on the importance*

of raising the mind above the world ; and his own life was a constant renunciation of worldly interests, a cheerful endurance of poverty that he might make many truly rich. So, his discourses continually revealed to man the doctrine of immortality ; and in his own person he brought down this truth to men's senses, by rising from the dead and ascending to another state of being. — I have only glanced at the unity which subsists between Jesus and his religion. Christianity, from every point of view, will be found an harmonious system. It breathes throughout one spirit and one purpose. Its doctrines, precepts, and examples have the consistency of reason.

But this is not enough. A rational religion must agree not only with itself, but with all other truths whether revealed by the outward creation or our own souls. I take then Christianity into the creation, I place it by the side of nature. Do they agree ? I say, Perfectly. I can discover nothing, in what claims to be God's word, at variance with his works. This is a bright proof of the reasonableness of Christianity. When I consult nature with the lights modern science affords, I see continually multiplying traces of the doctrine of One God. The more I extend my researches into nature, the more I see that it is a whole, the product of one wisdom, power, and goodness. It bears witness to one Author, nor has its testimony been without effect ; for although the human mind has often multiplied its objects of worship, still it has always tended towards the doctrine of the divine unity, and has embraced it more and more firmly in *the course of human improvement*. The Heathen,

while he erected many altars, generally believed in one Supreme Divinity, to whom the inferior deities were subjected and from whom they sprung. Need I tell you of the harmony which subsists between nature and revelation in this particular? To Christianity belongs the glory of having proclaimed this primitive truth with new power, and of having spread it over the whole civilized world. — Again. Nature gives intimation of another truth, I mean of the universal, impartial goodness of God. When I look round on the creation, I see nothing to lead me to suspect that its Author confines his love to a few. The sun sends no brighter beam into the palace of the proudest king, than into the hut of the meanest peasant. The clouds select not one man's fields rather than his neighbour's, but shed down their blessings on rich and poor, and still more on the just and the unjust. True, there is a variety of conditions among men; but this takes place, not by any interposition of God, but by fixed and general laws of nature. Impartial, universal goodness is the character in which God is revealed by his works, when they are properly understood; and need I tell you how brightly this truth shines in the pages of Christianity, and how this religion has been the great means of establishing it among men? — Again. When I look through nature, nothing strikes me more than the union which subsists among all its works. Nothing stands alone in the creation. The humblest plant has intimate connexions with the air, the clouds, the sun. Harmony is the great law of nature, and how strikingly does Christianity coincide here with God's works; for what is the design of this

religion, but to bring the human race, the intelligent creation of God, into a harmony, union, peace, like that which knits together the outward universe? I will give another illustration. It is one of the great laws of nature, that good shall come to us through agents of God's appointment; that beings shall receive life, support, knowledge, and safety through the interposition and labors and sufferings of others. Sometimes whole communities are rescued from oppression and ruin chiefly by the efforts and sacrifices of a wise, disinterested, and resolute individual. How accordant with this ordination of nature is the doctrine of Christianity, that our Heavenly Father, having purposed our recovery from sin and death, has instituted for this end the agency and mediation of his Son; that he has given an illustrious deliverer to the world, through whose toils and sufferings we may rise to purity and immortal life. — I say, then, that revelation is consistent with nature, when nature is truly interpreted by reason. I see it bringing out with noonday brightness the truths which dawn in nature; so that it is reason in its most perfect form.

I have thus carried Christianity abroad into nature. I now carry it within, and compare it with the human soul; and is it consistent with the great truths of reason which I discover there? I affirm, that it is. When I look into the soul, I am at once struck with its immeasurable superiority to the body. I am struck with the contrast between these different elements of my nature, between this active, soaring mind, and these *limbs and material organs* which tend perpetually to *the earth*, and are soon to be resolved into dust.

How consistent is Christianity with this inward teaching. In Christianity, with what strength, with what bold relief, is the supremacy of the spiritual nature brought out. What contempt does Jesus cast on the body and its interests, when compared with the redemption of the soul. — Another great truth dawns on me when I look within. I learn more and more, that the great springs of happiness and misery are in the mind, and that the efforts of men to secure peace by other processes than by inward purification are vain strivings; and Christianity is not only consistent with, but founded on this great truth; teaching us, that the kingdom of heaven is within us, and proposing, as its great end, to rescue the mind from evil, and to endue it with strength and dignity worthy its divine origin. — Again, when I look into the soul I meet intimations of another great truth. I discern in it capacities which are not fully unfolded here. I see desires which find no adequate good on earth. I see a principle of hope always pressing forward into futurity. Here are marks of a nature not made wholly for this world; and how does Christianity agree with this teaching of our own souls? Its great doctrine is that of a higher life, where the spiritual germ within us will open for ever, and where the immortal good after which the mind aspires will prove a reality. — Had I time, I might survey distinctly the various principles of the soul, the intellectual, moral, social, and active, and might show you how Christianity accords with them all, enlarging their scope and energy, proposing to them nobler objects, and aiding their development by the impulse of a boundless hope. But, commend-

ing these topics to your private meditation, I will take but one more view of the soul. When I look within, I see stains of sin, and fears and forebodings of guilt; and how adapted to such a nature is Christianity, a religion which contains blood-sealed promises of forgiveness to the penitent, and which proffers heavenly strength to fortify us in our conflict with moral evil. — I say, then, Christianity consists with the nature within us, as well as with nature around us. The highest truths in respect to the soul are not only responded to, but are carried out by Christianity, so that it deserves to be called the perfection of reason.

I have now shown, in a variety of particulars, that Christianity has the character of Consistency, and thus satisfies the first demand of reason. It does not divide the mind against itself, does not introduce discord into the intellect, by proposing doctrines which our consciousness and experience repel. But these views do not exhaust the present topic. It is not enough to speak of Christianity as furnishing views which harmonize with one another, and with all known truth. It gives a new and cheering consistency to the views with which we are furnished by the universe. Nature and providence, with all their beauty, regularity, and beneficence, have yet perplexing aspects. Their elements are often seen in conflict with one another. Sunshine and storms, pleasure and pain, success and disaster, abundance and want, health and sickness, life and death, seem to ordinary spectators to be mixed together confusedly and without aim. Reason desires *nothing* so earnestly, so anxiously, as to solve these *discordant appearances*, as to discover some great, cer-

tral, reconciling truth, around which they may be arranged, and from which they may borrow light and harmony. This deep want of the rational nature, Christianity has supplied. It has disclosed a unity of purpose in the seemingly hostile dispensations of Providence, and opened to the mind a new world of order, beauty, and benevolent design. Christianity, revealing, as it does, the unbounded mercy of God to his sinful creatures; revealing an endless futurity, in which the inequalities of the present state are to be redressed, and which reduces by its immensity the sorest pains of life to light and momentary evils; revealing a Moral Perfection, which is worth all pain and conflicts, and which is most effectually and gloriously won amidst suffering and temptation; revealing in Jesus Christ the sublimity and rewards of tried and all-enduring virtue; revealing in Him the founder of a new moral kingdom or power, which is destined to subdue the world to God; and proffering the Holy Spirit to all who strive to build up in themselves and others the reign of truth and virtue; Christianity, I say, by these revelations, has poured a flood of light over nature and providence, and harmonized the infinite complexity of the works and ways of God. Thus it meets the first want of the rational nature the craving for consistency of views. It is reason's most effectual minister and friend. Is it not then eminently a Rational Faith?

Having shown that Christianity has the character of consistency, I proceed to the second mark or stamp of reason on a religion, that is, Universality; and this I claim for Christianity. This indeed is one of the most *distinguishing* features of our religion, and so obvious

and striking as to need little illustration. When I examine the doctrines, precepts, and spirit of Christianity I discover, in them all, this character of Universal. I discover, nothing narrow, temporary, local. The gospel bears the stamp of no particular age or country. It does not concern itself with the perishable interests of communities or individuals ; but appeals to the Eternal, Universal, Immortal, Unbounded principle in human nature. Its aim is to direct the mind to the Infinite Being and to an Infinite good. It is not made up, like other religions, of precise forms and details ; but it inculcates immutable and all-comprehending principles of duty, obliging every man to apply them for himself to the ever-varying variety of human conditions. It separates from the partial, limited views of Judaism and heathenism and holds him forth in the sublime attributes of the Universal Father. In like manner it inculcates universal philanthropy without exceptions or bounds ; a love of man as man, a love founded on that immortal nature of which all men partake, and which binds us to recognize in each a child of God and a brother. The spirit of bigotry, which confines its charity to a sect, and the spirit of aristocracy, which looks on the multitude as an inferior race, are alike rebuked by Christianity. Which, eighteen hundred years ago, in a narrow, superstitious age, taught, what the present age is beginning to understand, that all men are essentially equal, and that all are to be honored, because made in the image of God and indued with capacities of ceaseless improvement. The more I examine Christianity, *more I am struck with its universality. I see a religion made for all regions and all times, for*

classes and all stages of society. It is fitted, not to the Asiatic or the European, but to the essential principles of human nature, to man under the tropical or polar skies, to all descriptions of intellect and condition. It speaks a language which all men need and all can understand ; enjoins a virtue, which is man's happiness and glory in every age and clime ; and ministers consolations and hopes which answer to man's universal lot, to the sufferings, the fear, and the self-rebuke, which cleave to our nature in every outward change. I see in it the light, not of one nation, but of the world ; and a light reaching beyond the world, beyond time, to higher modes of existence and to an interminable futurity. Other religions have been intended to meet the exigences of particular countries or times, and therefore society in its progress has outgrown them ; but Christianity meets more and more the wants of the soul in proportion to the advancement of our race, and thus proves itself to be Eternal Truth. After these remarks, may I not claim for Christianity that character of universality which is the highest distinction of reason ? To understand fully the confirmation which these views give to the gospel, you must compare it with the religions, prevalent in the age of Christ, all of which bore the marks of narrow, local, temporary institutions. How striking the contrast ! And how singular the fact, that amid this darkness there sprung up a religion so consistent and universal, as to deserve to be called the perfection of reason !

I do and must feel, my friends, that the claim of Christianity to the honor of being a rational religion is fully established. As such I commend it to you. As such it will more and more approve itself, in proportion as you study and practise it. You will never find cause to complain that, by adopting it, you have enslaved or degraded your highest powers. Here then I might stop, and might consider my work as done. But I am aware that objections have been made to the rational character of our religion, which may still linger in the minds of some of my hearers. A brief notice of these may aid the purpose, and will form a proper conclusion, of this discourse.

I imagine that, were some who are present to speak, they would tell me, that, if Christianity be judged by its fruits, it deserves any character but that of rational. I should be told that no religion has borne a more abundant harvest of extravagance and fanaticism. I should be told that reason is a calm, reflecting, sober principle, and I should be asked whether such is the character of the Christianity which has overspread the world. Perhaps some of you will remind me of the feverish, wild, passionate religion, which is now systematically dispersed through our country, and I shall be asked whether a system under which such delusions prevail can be a rational one.

To these objections I answer, You say much that is true. I grant that reason is a calm and reflecting principle, and I see little calmness or reflection among many who take exclusively the name of Christ. But *I say, you have no right to confound Christianity with its professors.* This religion, as you know, has come

down to us through many ages of darkness, during which it must have been corrupted and obscured. Common candor requires that you should judge of it as it came from its Founder. Go, then, to its original records; place yourselves near Jesus; and tell me if you ever found yourselves in the presence of so calm a teacher. We indeed discern in Jesus great earnestness, but joined with entire self-control. Sensibility breathes through his whole teaching and life, but always tempered with wisdom. Amidst his boldest thoughts and expressions, we discover no marks of ungoverned feeling or a diseased imagination. Take, as an example, his longest discourse, the Sermon on the Mount. How weighty the thoughts! How grave and dignified the style! You recollect, that the multitude were astonished, not at the passionate vehemence, but at the authority, with which he spoke. Read next the last discourse of Jesus to his disciples in St. John's Gospel. What a deep, yet mild and subdued tenderness mingles with conscious greatness in that wonderful address. Take what is called the Lord's Prayer, which Jesus gave as the model of all prayer to God. Does that countenance fanatical fervor, or violent appeals to our Creator? Let me further ask, Does Jesus any where place religion in tumultuous, ungoverned emotion? Does he not teach us, that obedience, not feeling, marks and constitutes true piety, and that the most acceptable offering to God is to exercise mercy to our fellow creatures? When I compare the clamorous preaching and passionate declamation, too common in the Christian world, with the composed dignity, the deliberate wisdom,

the freedom from all extravagance, which characterized Jesus, I can imagine no greater contrast; and I am sure that the fiery zealot is no representative of Christianity.

I have done with the first objection; but another class of objections is often urged against the reasonable character of our religion. It has been strenuously maintained, that Christianity contains particular doctrines, which are irrational, and which involve the whole religion, to which they are essential, in their own condemnation. To this class of objections I have a short reply. I insist that these offensive doctrines do not belong to Christianity, but are human additions, and therefore do not derogate from its reasonableness and truth. What is the doctrine most frequently adduced to fix the charge of irrationality on the gospel? It is the Trinity. This is pronounced by the unbeliever a gross offence to reason. It teaches that there is one God, and yet that there are three divine persons. According to the doctrine, these three persons perform different offices, and sustain different relations to each other. One is Father, another his Son. One sends, another is sent. They love each other, converse with each other, and make a covenant with each other; and yet, with all these distinctions, they are, according to the doctrine, not different beings, but one being, one and the same God. Is this a rational doctrine? has often been the question of the objector to Christianity. I answer, No. I can as easily believe that the whole human race are one man, as that three infinite persons, performing such different *offices*, are one God. But I maintain, that, because

the Trinity is irrational, it does not follow that the same reproach belongs to Christianity ; for this doctrine is no part of the Christian religion. I know, there are passages which are continually quoted in its defence ; but allow me to prove doctrines in the same way, that is, by detaching texts from their connexion and interpreting them without reference to the general current of Scripture, and I can prove any thing and every thing from the Bible. I can prove, that God has human passions. I can prove transubstantiation, which is taught much more explicitly than the Trinity. Detached texts prove nothing. Christ is called God ; the same title is given to Moses and to rulers. Christ has said, “ I and my Father are one ; ” so he prayed that all his disciples might be one, meaning not one and the same being, but one in affection and purpose. I ask you, before you judge on this point, to read the Scriptures as a whole, and to inquire into their general strain and teaching in regard to Christ. I find him uniformly distinguishing between himself and God, calling himself, not God the Son, but the Son of God, continually speaking of himself as sent by God, continually referring his power and miracles to God. I hear him saying, that of himself he can do nothing, and praying to his Father under the character of the only true God. Such I affirm to be the tenor, the current, the general strain of the New Testament ; and the scattered passages, on which a different doctrine is built, should have no weight against this host of witnesses. Do not rest your faith on a few texts. Sometimes these favorite texts are no part of Scripture. For example, the *famous passage* on which the Trinity mainly

rests, "There are three that bear record in Heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one," — this text, I say, though found at present in John's Epistle, and read in our churches, has been pronounced by the ablest critics a forgery ; and a vast majority of the educated ministers of this country are satisfied, that it is not a part of Scripture. Suffer no man, then, to select texts for you as decisive of religious controversies. Read the whole record for yourselves, and possess yourselves of its general import. I am very desirous to separate the doctrine in question from Christianity, because it fastens the charge of irrationality on the whole religion. It is one of the great obstacles to the propagation of the Gospel. The Jews will not hear of a Trinity. I have seen in the countenance, and heard in the tones of the voice, the horror with which that people shrink from the doctrine, that God died on the cross. Mahometans, too, when they hear this opinion from Christian missionaries, repeat the first article of their faith, "There is one God ;" and look with pity or scorn on the disciples of Jesus, as deserters of the plainest and greatest truth of religion. Even the Indian of our wilderness, who worships the Great Spirit, has charged absurdity on the teacher who has gone to indoctrinate him in a Trinity. How many, too, in Christian countries have suspected the whole religion for this one error. Believing then, as I do, that it forms no part of Christianity, my allegiance to Jesus Christ calls me openly to withstand it. In so doing I would wound no man's feelings. I doubt not, that they who adopt this doctrine intend, equally with *those who oppose it*, to render homage to the truth and

service to Christianity. They think that their peculiar faith gives new interest to the character and new authority to the teaching of Jesus. But they grievously err. The views, by which they hope to build up love towards Christ, detract from the perfection of his Father ; and I fear, that the kind of piety, which prevails now in the Christian world, bears witness to the sad influence of this obscuration of the true glory of God. We need not desert reason or corrupt Christianity, to ensure the purest, deepest love towards the only true God, or towards Jesus Christ, whom he has sent for our redemption.

I have named one doctrine, which is often urged against Christianity as irrational. There is one more on which I would offer a few remarks. Christianity has often been reproached with teaching, that God brings men into life totally depraved, and condemns immense multitudes to everlasting misery for sins to which their nature has irresistibly impelled them. This is said to be irrational, and consequently such must be the religion which teaches it. I certainly shall not attempt to vindicate this theological fiction. A more irrational doctrine could not, I think, be contrived ; and it is something worse ; it is as immoral in its tendency, as it is unreasonable. It is suited to alienate men from God and from one another. Were it really believed (which it cannot be), men would look up with dread and detestation to the Author of their being, and look round with horror on their fellow creatures. It would dissolve society. Were men to see in one another wholly corrupt beings, incarnate fiends, without one genuine virtue, society would become as re-

pulsive as a den of lions or a nest of vipers. All confidence, esteem, love, would die ; and without these, the interest, charm, and worth of existence would expire. What a pang would shoot through a parent's heart, if he were to see in the smiling infant a moral being, continually and wholly propense to sin, in whose mind were thickly sown the seeds of hatred to God and goodness, and who had commenced his existence under the curse of his Creator ? What good man could consent to be a parent, if his offspring were to be born to this infinitely wretched inheritance ? I say the doctrine is of immoral tendency ; but I do not say that they who profess it are immoral. The truth is, that none do or can hold it in its full and proper import. I have seen its advocates smile as benignantly on the child whom their creed has made a demon, as if it were an angel ; and I have seen them mingling with their fellow creatures as cordially and confidingly as if the doctrine of total depravity had never entered their ears. Perhaps the most mischievous effect of the doctrine is the dishonor which it has thrown on Christianity. This dishonor I would wipe away. Christianity teaches no such doctrine. Where do you find it in the New Testament ? Did Jesus teach it, when he took little children in his arms and blessed them, and said " Of such is the kingdom of God " ? Did Paul teach it, when he spoke of the Gentiles, who have not the law, or a written revelation, but who do by nature the things contained in the law ? Christianity indeed speaks strongly of human guilt, but always treats men as beings who have the power of doing right, and who have *come into existence* under the smile of their Creator.

I have now completed my vindication of the claim of the gospel to the character of a rational religion ; and my aim has been, not to serve a party, but the cause of our common Christianity. At the present day, one of the most urgent duties of its friends is, to rescue it from the reproach of waging war with reason. The character of our age demands this. There have been times when Christianity, though loaded with unreasonable doctrines, retained its hold on men's faith ; for men had not learned to think. They received their religion as children learn the catechism ; they substituted the priest for their own understandings, and cared neither what nor why they believed. But that day is gone by, and the spirit of freedom, which has succeeded it, is subjecting Christianity to a scrutiny more and more severe ; and if this religion cannot vindicate itself to the reflecting, the calm, the wise, as a reasonable service, it cannot stand. Fanatical sects may, for a time, spread an intolerant excitement through a community, and impose silence on the objections of the skeptical. But fanaticism is the epidemic of a season ; it wastes itself by its own violence. Sooner or later the voice of reflection will be heard. Men will ask, What are the claims of Christianity ? Does it bear the marks of truth ? And if it be found to war with nature and reason, it will be, and it ought to be, abandoned. On this ground, I am anxious that Christianity should be cleared from all human additions and corruptions. If indeed irrational doctrines belong to it, then I have no desire to separate them from it. I have no desire, for the sake of *upholding the gospel*, to wrap up and conceal, much

less to deny, any of its real principles. Did I think that it was burdened with one irrational doctrine, I would say so, and I would leave it, as I found it, with this millstone round its neck. But I know none such. I meet, indeed, some difficulties in the narrative part of the New Testament; and there are arguments in the Epistles, which, however suited to the Jews, to whom they were first addressed, are not apparently adapted to men at large; but I see not a principle of the religion, which my reason, calmly and impartially exercised, pronounces inconsistent with any great truth. I have the strongest conviction, that Christianity is reason in its most perfect form, and therefore I plead for its disengagement from the irrational additions with which it has been clogged for ages.

With these views of Christianity, I do and I must hold it fast. I cannot surrender it to the cavils or scoffs of infidelity. I do not blush to own it, for it is a rational religion. It satisfies the wants of the intellect as well as those of the heart. I know that men of strong minds have opposed it. But, as if Providence intended that their sophistry should carry a refutation on its own front, they have generally fallen into errors so gross and degrading, as to prove them to be any thing rather than the apostles of reason. When I go from the study of Christianity to their writings, I feel as if I were passing from the warm, bright sun into a chilling twilight, which too often deepens into utter darkness. I am not, then, ashamed of the Gospel. I see it glorified by the hostile systems which are reared for its destruction. I follow Jesus, because he is eminently "*the Light*"; and I doubt not, that, to his true

disciples, he will be a guide to that world, where the obscurities of our present state will be dispersed, and where reason as well as virtue will be unfolded under the quickening influence and in the more manifest presence of God.

DISCOURSE IV.

1 PETER ii. 17.

HONOR ALL MEN.

Among the many and inestimable blessings of Christianity, I regard, as not the least, the new sentiment with which it teaches man to look upon his fellow beings ; the new interest which it awakens in us towards every thing human ; the new importance which it gives to the soul ; the new relation which it establishes between man and man. In this respect, it began a mighty revolution, which has been silently spreading itself through society, and which, I believe, is not to stop, until new ties shall have taken place of those which have hitherto, in the main, connected the human race. Christianity has as yet but begun its work of reformation. Under its influences, a new order of society is advancing, surely though slowly ; and this beneficent change it is to accomplish in no small measure by revealing to men their own nature, and teaching them to "honor all" who partake it.


As yet Christianity has done little, compared with what it is to do, in establishing the true bond of union between man and man. The old bonds of society still *continue in a great degree*. They are instinct, inter-

est, force. The true tie, which is mutual respect, calling forth mutual, growing, never-failing acts of love, is as yet little known. A new revelation, if I may so speak, remains to be made ; or rather, the truths of the old revelation in regard to the greatness of human nature, are to be brought out from obscurity and neglect. The soul is to be regarded with a religious reverence, hitherto unfelt ; and the solemn claims of every being to whom this divine principle is imparted, are to be established on the ruins of those pernicious principles, both in church and state, which have so long divided mankind into the classes of the abject Many and the self-exalting Few.

There is nothing of which men know so little, as themselves. They understand incomparably more of the surrounding creation, of matter, and of its laws, than of that spiritual principle, to which matter was made to be the minister, and without which the outward universe would be worthless. Of course, no man can be wholly a stranger to the soul, for the soul is himself, and he cannot but be conscious of its most obvious workings. But it is to most a chaos, a region shrouded in ever-shifting mists, baffling the eye and bewildering the imagination. The affinity of the mind with God, its moral power, the purposes for which its faculties were bestowed, its connexion with futurity, and the dependence of its whole happiness on its own right action and progress, these truths, though they might be expected to absorb us, are to most men little more than sounds, and to none of us those living realities, which, I trust, they are to become. That conviction, *without which we are all poor, of the unlimited*

and immortal nature of the soul, remains in a great degree to be developed. Men have as yet no just respect for themselves, and of consequence no just respect for others. The true bond of society is thus wanting ; and accordingly there is a great deficiency of Christian benevolence. There is indeed much instinctive, native benevolence, and this is not to be despised ; but the benevolence of Jesus Christ, which consists in a calm purpose to suffer, and, if need be, to die for our fellow creatures, the benevolence of Christ on the cross, which is the true pattern to the Christian, this is little known ; and what is the cause ? It is this. We see nothing in human beings to entitle them to such sacrifices ; we do not think them worth suffering for. Why should we be martyrs for beings, who awaken in us little more of moral interest than the brutes ?


I hold, that nothing is to make man a true lover of man, but the discovery of something interesting and great in human nature. We must see and feel, that a human being is something important and of immeasurable importance. We must see and feel the broad distance between the spiritual life within us, and the vegetable or animal life which acts around us. I cannot love the flower, however beautiful, with a disinterested affection, which will make me sacrifice to it my own prosperity. You will in vain exhort me to attach myself, with my whole strength of affection, to the inferior animals, however useful or attractive ; and why not ? They want the capacity of truth, virtue, and progress. They want that principle of duty, which alone gives permanence to a being ; and accordingly *they soon lose their individual nature and go to mingle*



with the general mass. A human being deserves a different affection from what we bestow on inferior creatures, for he has a rational and moral nature, by which he is to endure for ever, by which he may achieve an unutterable happiness, or sink into an unutterable woe. He is more interesting through what is in him, than the earth or heavens ; and the only way to love him aright, is to catch some glimpse of this immortal power within him. Until this is done, all charity is little more than instinct ; we shall embrace the great interests of human nature with coldness.

It may be said, that Christianity has done much to awaken benevolence, and that it has taught men to call one another brethren. Yes, to *call* one another so ; but has it as yet given the true feeling of brotherhood ? We undoubtedly feel ourselves to be all of one race, and this is well. We trace ourselves up to one pair, and feel the same blood flowing in our veins. But do we understand our Spiritual Brotherhood ? Do we feel ourselves to be derived from one Heavenly Parent, in whose image we are all made, and whose perfection we may constantly approach ? Do we feel that there is one divine life in our own and in all souls ? This seems to me the only true bond of man to man. Here is a tie more sacred, more enduring, than all the ties of this earth. Is it felt, and do we in consequence truly honor one another ?

Sometimes, indeed, we see men giving sincere, profound, and almost unmeasured respect to their fellow creatures ; but to whom ? To great men ; to men distinguished by a broad line from the multitude ; to men preëminent by *genius*, force of character, daring effort,



high station, brilliant success. To such, honor is given; but this is not to "honor all men"; and the homage paid to such is generally unfriendly to that Christian estimate of human beings for which I am now pleading. The great are honored at the expense of their race. They absorb and concentrate the world's admiration and their less gifted fellow beings are thrown by their brightness into a deeper shade, and passed over with a colder contempt. Now I have no desire to derogate from the honor paid to great men, but I say, Let them not rise by the depression of the multitude. I say, that great men, justly regarded, exalt our estimate of the human race, and bind us to the multitude of men more closely; and when they are not so regarded, when they are converted into idols, when they serve to wean our interest from ordinary men, they corrupt us, they sever the sacred bond of humanity which should attach us to all, and our characters become vitiated by our very admiration of greatness. The true view of great men is, that they are only examples and manifestations of our common nature, showing what belongs to all souls, though unfolded as yet only in a few. The light which shines from them is, after all, but a faint revelation of the power which is treasured up in every human being. They are not prodigies, not miracles, but natural developements of the human soul. They are indeed as men among children, but the children have a principle of growth which leads to manhood.

That great men and the multitude of minds are of one family, is apparent, I think, in the admiration *which the great inspire into the multitude.* A sincere,

enlightened admiration always springs from something congenial in him who feels it with him who inspires it. He that can understand and delight in greatness was created to partake of it ; the germ is in him ; and sometimes this admiration, in what we deem inferior minds, discovers a nobler spirit than belongs to the great man who awakens it ; for sometimes the great man is so absorbed in his own greatness as to admire no other ; and I should not hesitate to say, that a common mind, which is yet capable of a generous admiration, is destined to rise higher than the man of eminent capacities, who can enjoy no power or excellence but his own. When I hear of great men, I wish not to separate them from their race, but to blend them with it. I esteem it no small benefit of the philosophy of mind, that it teaches us that the elements of the greatest thoughts of the man of genius exist in his humbler brethren, and that the faculties, which the scientific exert in the profoundest discoveries, are precisely the same with those which common men employ in the daily labors of life.

To show the grounds on which the obligation to honor all men rests, I might take a minute survey of that human nature which is common to all, and set forth its claims to reverence. But leaving this wide range, I observe that there is one principle of the soul, which makes all men essentially equal, which places all on a level as to means of happiness, which may place in the first rank of human beings those who are the most depressed in worldly condition, and which therefore gives the most depressed a title to interest

and respect. I refer to the Sense of Duty, to the power of discerning and doing right, to the moral and religious principle, to the inward monitor which speaks in the name of God, to the capacity of virtue or excellence. This is the great gift of God. We can conceive no greater. In seraph and archangel, we can conceive no higher energy than the power of virtue, or the power of forming themselves after the will and moral perfections of God. This power breaks down all barriers between the seraph and the lowest human being; it makes them brethren. Whoever has derived from God this perception and capacity of rectitude, has a bond of union with the spiritual world, stronger than all the ties of nature. He possesses a principle, which, if he is faithful to it, must carry him forward for ever, and ensures to him the improvement and happiness of the highest order of beings.

It is this moral power, which makes all men essentially equal, which annihilates all the distinctions of this world. Through this, the ignorant and the poor may become the greatest of the race; for the greatest is he who is most true to the principle of duty. It is not improbable, that the noblest human beings are to be found in the least favored conditions of society, among those, whose names are never uttered beyond the narrow circle in which they toil and suffer, who have but "two mites" to give away, who have perhaps not even that, but who "desire to be fed with the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table"; for in this class may be found those, who have withstood the severest temptation, who have practised the most arduous duties, who have confided in God under the

heaviest trials, who have been most wronged and have forgiven most ; and these are the great, the exalted. It matters nothing, what the particular duties are to which the individual is called, — how minute or obscure in their outward form. Greatness in God's sight lies, not in the extent of the sphere which is filled, or of the effect which is produced, but altogether in the power of virtue in the soul, in the energy with which God's will is chosen, with which trial is borne, and goodness loved and pursued.

The sense of duty is the greatest gift of God. The Idea of Right is the primary and the highest revelation of God to the human mind, and all outward revelations are founded on and addressed to it. All mysteries of science and theology fade away before the grandeur of the simple perception of duty, which dawns on the mind of the little child. That perception brings him into the moral kingdom of God. That lays on him an everlasting bond. He, in whom the conviction of duty is unfolded, becomes subject from that moment to a law, which no power in the universe can abrogate. He forms a new and indissoluble connexion with God, that of an accountable being. He begins to stand before an inward tribunal, on the decisions of which his whole happiness rests ; he hears a voice, which, if faithfully followed, will guide him to perfection, and in neglecting which he brings upon himself inevitable misery. We little understand the solemnity of the moral principle in every human mind. We think not how awful are its functions. We forget that it is the germ of immortality. Did we understand it, we

should look with a feeling of reverence on every being to whom it is given.

Having shown in the preceding remarks, that there is a foundation in the human soul for the honor enjoined in our text towards all men, I proceed to observe, that, if we look next into Christianity, we shall find this duty enforced by new and still more solemn considerations. This whole religion is a testimony to the worth of man in the sight of God, to the importance of human nature, to the infinite purposes for which we were framed. God is there set forth, as sending, to the succour of his human family, his Beloved Son, the bright image and representative of his own perfections; and sending him, not simply to roll away a burden of pain and punishment (for this, however magnified in systems of theology, is not his highest work), but to create men after that divine image which he himself bears, to purify the soul from every stain, to communicate to it new power over evil, and to open before it Immortality as its aim and destination, — Immortality, by which we are to understand, not merely a perpetual, but an ever-improving and celestial being. Such are the views of Christianity. And these blessings it proffers, not to a few, not to the educated, not to the eminent, but to all human beings, to the poorest, and the most fallen; and we know, that, through the power of its promises, it has in not a few instances raised the most fallen to true greatness, and given them in their present virtue and peace an earnest of the Heaven which it unfolds. Such is Christianity. Men, viewed in the light of *this religion*, are beings cared for by God, to whom

he has given his Son, on whom he pours forth his Spirit, and whom he has created for the highest good in the universe, for participation in his own perfections and happiness. My friends, such is Christianity. Our skepticism as to our own nature cannot quench the bright light which that religion sheds on the soul and on the prospects of mankind ; and just as far as we receive its truth, we shall honor all men.

I know I shall be told that Christianity speaks of man as a sinner, and thus points him out to abhorrence and scorn. I know it speaks of human sin, but it does not speak of this as indissolubly bound up with the soul, as entering into the essence of human nature, but as a temporary stain, which it calls on us to wash away. Its greatest doctrine is, that the most lost are recoverable, that the most fallen may rise, and that there is no height of purity, power, felicity in the universe, to which the guiltiest mind may not, through penitence, attain. Christianity indeed gives us a deeper, keener feeling of the guilt of mankind, than any other religion. By the revelation of perfection in the character of Jesus Christ, it shows us how imperfect even the best men are. But it reveals perfection in Jesus, not for our discouragement, but as our model, reveals it only that we may thirst for and approach it. From Jesus I learn what man is to become, that is, if true to this new light ; and true he may be.

Christianity, I have said, shows man as a sinner, but I nowhere meet in it those dark views of our race which would make us shrink from it as from a nest of *venomous reptiles*. According to the courteous style

of theology, man has been called half brute and half devil. But this is a perverse and pernicious exaggeration. The brute, as it is called, that is, animal appetite, is indeed strong in human beings ; but is there nothing within us but appetite ? Is there nothing to war with it ? Does this constitute the essence of the soul ? Is it not rather an accident, the result of the mind's union with matter ? Is not its spring in the body, and may it not be expected to perish with the body ? In addition to animal propensities, I see the tendency to criminal excess in all men's passions. I see not one only, but many Tempters in every human heart. Nor am I insensible to the fearful power of these enemies to our virtue. But is there nothing in man but temptation, but propensity to sin ? Are there no counterworking powers ? no attractions in virtue ? no tendencies to God ? no sympathies with sorrow ? no reverence for greatness ? no moral conflicts ? no triumphs of principle ? This very strength of temptation seems to me to be one of the indications of man's greatness. It shows a being framed to make progress through difficulty, suffering, and conflict ; that is, it shows a being designed for the highest order of virtues ; for we all feel by an unerring instinct, that virtue is elevated in proportion to the obstacles which it surmounts, to the power with which it is chosen and held fast. I see men placed by their Creator on a field of battle ; but compassed with peril that they may triumph over it ; and though often overborne, still summoned to new efforts, still privileged to approach the source of all power and to seek " grace in *time of need*," and still addressed in tones of encouragement by a celestial leader, who has himself fought

and conquered, and holds forth to them his own crown of righteousness and victory.

From these brief views of human nature and of Christianity you will see the grounds of the solemn obligation of honoring all men, of attaching infinite importance to human nature, and of respecting it, even in its present infant, feeble, tottering state. This sentiment of honor or respect for human beings, strikes me more and more as essential to the Christian character. I conceive that a more thorough understanding and a more faithful culture of this, would do very much to carry forward the church and the world. In truth, I attach to this sentiment such importance, that I measure by its progress the progress of society. I judge of public events very much by their bearing on this. I estimate political revolutions, chiefly by their tendency to exalt men's conceptions of their nature, and to inspire them with respect for one another's claims. The present stupendous movements in Europe naturally suggest and almost force upon me this illustration of the importance which I have given to the sentiment enjoined in our text. Allow me to detain you a few moments on this topic.

What is it then, I ask, which makes the present revolutionary movement abroad so interesting? I answer, that I see in it the principle of respect for human nature and for the human race developing itself more powerfully, and this to me constitutes its chief interest. I see in it proofs, indications, that the mind is awakening to a consciousness of what it is, and of what it is made for. In this movement I see man *becoming to himself* a higher object. I see him &

taining to the conviction' of the equal and indestructible rights of every human being. I see the dawning of that great principle, that the individual is not made to be the instrument of others, but to govern himself by an inward law, and to advance towards his proper perfection; that he belongs to himself and to God, and to no human superior. I know, indeed, that, in the present state of the world, these conceptions are exceeding unsettled and obscure; and in truth little effort has hitherto been made to place them in a clear light, and to give them a definite and practical form, in men's minds. The multitude know not with any distinctness what they want. Imagination, unschooled by reason and experience, dazzles them with bright but baseless visions. They are driven onward with a perilous violence, by a vague consciousness of not having found their element; by a vague yet noble faith in a higher good than they have attained; by impatience under restraints, which they feel to be degrading. In this violence, however, there is nothing strange, nor ought it to discourage us. It is, I believe, universally true, that great principles, in their first developement, manifest themselves irregularly. It is so in religion. In history we often see religion, especially after long depression, breaking out in vehemence and enthusiasm, sometimes stirring up bloody conflicts, and through struggles establishing a calmer empire over society. In like manner political history shows us, that men's consciousness of their rights and essential equality has at first developed itself passionately. Still the *consciousness* is a noble one, and the presage of a better *social state*.

Am I asked what I hope from the present revolutionary movements in Europe ? I answer, that I hope a good which includes all others, and which almost hides all others from my view. I hope the subversion of institutions, by which the true bond between man and man has been more or less dissolved, by which the will of one or a few has broken down the will, the heart, the conscience of the many ; and I hope that, in the place of these, are to grow up institutions, which will express, cherish, and spread far and wide a just respect for human nature, which will strengthen in men a consciousness of their powers, duties, and rights, which will train the individual to moral and religious independence, which will propose as their end the elevation of all orders of the community, and which will give full scope to the best minds in this work of general improvement. I do not say, that I expect it to be suddenly realized. The sun, which is to bring on a brighter day, is rising in thick and threatening clouds. Perhaps the minds of men were never more unquiet than at the present moment. Still I do not despair. That a higher order of ideas or principles is beginning to be unfolded ; that a wider philanthropy is beginning to triumph over the distinctions of ranks and nations ; that a new feeling of what is due to the ignorant, poor, and depraved has sprung up ; that the right of every human being to such an education as shall call forth his best faculties, and train him more and more to control himself, is recognised as it never was before ; and that government is more and more regarded as *intended not to elevate the few, but to guard the rights*

of all ; that these great revolutions in principle have commenced and are spreading, who can deny ? and to me they are prophetic of an improved condition of human nature and human affairs. — Oh that this melioration might be accomplished without blood ! As a Christian, I feel a misgiving when I rejoice in any good, however great, for which this fearful price has been paid. In truth, a good, so won, is necessarily imperfect and generally transient. War may subvert a despotism, but seldom builds up better institutions. Even when joined, as in our own history, with high principles, it inflames and leaves behind it passions, which make liberty a feverish conflict of jealous parties, and which expose a people to the tyranny of faction under the forms of freedom. Few things impair men's reverence for human nature, more than war ; and did I not see other and holier influences than the sword working out the regeneration of the race, I should indeed despair.

In this discourse I have spoken of the grounds and importance of that honor or respect which is due from us, and enjoined on us, towards all human beings. The various forms, in which this principle is to be exercised or manifested, I want time to enlarge on. I would only say, "Honor all men." Honor man from the beginning to the end of his earthly course. Honor the child. Welcome into being the infant, with a feeling of its mysterious grandeur, with the feeling, that an immortal existence has begun, that a spirit has been kindled which is never to be quenched. Honor the child. On this principle all good education rests.

Never shall we learn to train up the child, till we take it in our arms, as Jesus did, and feel distinctly that "of such is the kingdom of heaven." In that short sentence is taught the spirit of the true system of education; and for want of understanding it, little effectual aid, I fear, is yet given to the heavenly principle in the infant soul. — Again. Honor the poor. This sentiment of respect is essential to improving the connexion between the more and less prosperous conditions of society. This alone makes beneficence truly god-like. Without it, almsgiving degrades the receiver. We must learn how slight and shadowy are the distinctions between us and the poor; and that the last in outward condition may be first in the best attributes of humanity. A fraternal union, founded on this deep conviction, and intended to lift up and strengthen the exposed and tempted poor, is to do infinitely more for that suffering class, than all our artificial associations; and till Christianity shall have breathed into us this spirit of respect for our nature, wherever it is found, we shall do them little good. I conceive, that in the present low state of Christian virtue, we little apprehend the power which might be exerted over the fallen and destitute, by a benevolence which should truly, thoroughly recognise in them the image of God.

Perhaps none of us have yet heard or can comprehend the tone of voice, in which a man, thoroughly impressed with this sentiment, would speak to a fellow creature. It is a language hardly known on earth; and no eloquence, I believe, has achieved such wonders as it is destined to accomplish. I must stop, though I have but begun the application of the prin-

ciple which I have urged. I will close as I began, with saying, that the great revelation which man now needs, is a revelation of man to himself. The faith which is most wanted, is a faith in what we and our fellow beings may become, a faith in the divine germ or principle in every soul. In regard to most of what are called the mysteries of religion, we may innocently be ignorant. But the mystery within ourselves, the mystery of our spiritual, accountable, immortal nature, it behoves us to explore. Happy are they who have begun to penetrate it, and in whom it has awakened feelings of awe towards themselves, and of deep interest and honor towards their fellow creatures.

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DISCOURSE V.

MATTHEW xvi. 24.

THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES, IF ANY MAN
WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND
TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME.

THIS passage is an example of our Saviour's mode of teaching. He has given us his truth in the costume of the age; and this style is so common in the New Testament, that an acquaintance with the usages of those times is necessary to the understanding of a large part of his instructions. The cross was then a mode of punishment reserved for the greatest criminals, and was intended to inflict the deepest disgrace as well as sorest pain. "To take up the cross" had therefore become a proverbial expression of the most dreaded suffering and shame. By this phrase in the text, Jesus intended to teach, that no man could become his disciple without such a deep conviction of the truth and excellence of his religion, as would fortify the mind against persecution, reproach, and death. The command "to deny ourselves" is more literal, but is an instance of what is very common in our Saviour's teaching, I mean, of the use of unlimited expressions,

which require to be restrained by the good sense of the hearer, and which, if taken without considerable modification, may lead into pernicious error. We know that this precept, for want of a wise caution, has driven men to self-inflicted penance and to the austerities of the cloister and wilderness; and it is one among many proofs of the necessity of a calm and sober judgment to a beneficial use of Christianity.

In this discourse I shall offer remarks on the limits or just extent of Christian Self-denial, and on the design of Providence in so constituting us, as to make self-denial necessary; and in discussing these topics I shall set before you its obligation, necessity, and excellence.

We are to deny ourselves; but how far? to what extent? This is our first inquiry. Are we to deny ourselves wholly? To deny ourselves in every power, faculty, and affection of our nature? Has the duty no bounds? For example, are we to deny the highest part of our nature, I mean conscience, or the moral faculty? Are we to oppose our sense of right, our desire of virtue? Every Christian says, No. Conscience is sacred; and revelation is intended to quicken, not resist it.

Again, are we to deny reason, the intellectual faculty, by which we weigh evidence, trace out causes and effects, ascend to universal truths, and seek to establish harmony among all our views. The answer to this question seems as plain as to the former. *Yet many good men have seemed to dread reason, have imagined an inconsistency between faith and a*

free use of our intellectual powers, and have insisted that it is a religious duty "to prostrate our understandings." To some this may even seem a principal branch of Christian self-denial. The error I think is a great one; and believing that the honor, progress, and beneficial influence of Christianity are involved in its removal, I wish to give it a brief consideration.

I am told that I must deny reason. I ask, Must I deny it, when it teaches me that there is a God? If so, the very foundation of religion is destroyed, and I am abandoned to utter unbelief. Again, must I deny reason when it forbids the literal interpretation of the text, which commands us to hate father and mother and our own lives? If so, I must rupture the most sacred ties of domestic life, and must add to social vices the crime of self-murder. Surely reason, in its teachings on these great subjects, is not to be denied, but revered and obeyed; and if revered here, where ought it to be contemned and renounced?

I am told, that we have a better guide than reason, even God's word, and that this is to be followed and the other denied. But I ask, How do I know that Christianity is God's word? Are not the evidences of this religion submitted to reason? and if this faculty be unworthy of trust, is not revelation necessarily involved in the same condemnation? The truth is, and it ought not to be disguised, that our ultimate reliance is and must be on our own reason. Faith in this power lies at the foundation of all other faith. No trust can be placed in God, if we discredit the faculty by which God is discerned. — I have another objection to the doctrine, *that we must deny reason in order to follow*

revelation. Reason is the very faculty to which revelation is addressed, and by which alone it can be explained. Without it we should be incapable of divine teaching, just as without the eye we should lose the happiest influences of the sun ; and they who would discourage the use of reason, that we may better receive revelation, are much like those, who should bind up or pluck out the eye, that we might enjoy to the full the splendor of day.

Perhaps I shall be pointed to the many and gross errors into which reason has fallen on almost every subject, and shall be told that here are motives for distrusting and denying it. I reply, first, by asking how we detect these errors. By what power do we learn that reason so often misguides us ? Is it not by reason itself ? and shall we renounce it on account of its capacity of rectifying its own wrong judgments ? — Consider next, that on no subject has reason gone more astray, than in the interpretation of the Scriptures ; so that if it is to be denied on account of its errors, we must especially debar it from the study of revelation ; in other words, we must shut the word of God in despair, a consequence, which, to a Protestant, is a sufficient refutation of the doctrine from which it flows.

A common method of enforcing the denial of reason, is to contrast it with the Infinite Intelligence of God, and then to ask whether it can be prostrated too submissively, or renounced too humbly, before Him. I acknowledge reverently the immeasurable superiority of God to human reason ; but I do not therefore condemn or renounce it ; for, in the first place, it is as true *of the "rapt seraph"* as of man, that his intelligence is

most narrow, compared with the divine. Is no honor therefore due to angelic wisdom? In the next place, I observe that human reason, imperfect though it be, is still the offspring of God, allied to him intimately, and worthy of its divine Parent. There is no extravagance in calling it, as is sometimes done, "a beam of the infinite light"; for it involves in its very essence those immutable and everlasting principles of truth and rectitude, which constitute the glory of the Divine Mind. It ascends to the sublime idea of God by possessing kindred attributes, and knows him only through its affinity with him. It carries within itself the germ of that spiritual perfection, which is the great end of the creation. Is it not then truly a "partaker of a divine nature"? Can we think or speak of it too gratefully or with too much respect? — The Infinity of God, so far from calling on me to prostrate and annihilate reason, exalts my conception of it. It is my faith in this perfection of the Divine Mind that inspires me with reverence for the human, for they are intimately connected, the latter being a derivation from the former, and endued with the power of approaching its original more and more through eternity. Severed from God, reason would lose its grandeur. In his infinity it has at once a source and a pledge of endless and unbounded improvement. God delights to communicate himself; and therefore his greatness, far from inspiring contempt for human reason, gives it a sacredness, and opens before it the most elevating hopes. The error of men is not, that they exaggerate, but that they do not know or suspect the worth and dignity of their *rational nature*.

Perhaps I shall be told, that reason is not to be denied universally, but only in cases where its teachings are contradicted by revelation. To this I reply, that a contradiction between reason and a genuine revelation cannot exist. A doctrine claiming a divine origin would refute itself, by opposing any of the truths, which reason intuitively discerns, or which it gathers from nature. God is the "Father of lights" and the "Author of concord," and he cannot darken and distract the human mind by jarring and irreconcilable instructions. He cannot subvert the authority of the very faculty, through which we arrive at the knowledge of himself. A revelation from the Author of our rational nature will certainly be adapted to its fundamental laws. I am aware, that it is very possible to give the name of reason to rash prejudices and corrupt opinions, and that on this ground we may falsely pronounce a genuine revelation to be inconsistent with reason; and our liableness to this delusion binds us to judge calmly, cautiously, and in the fear of God. But if, after a deliberate and impartial use of our best faculties, a professed revelation seems to us plainly to disagree with itself or to clash with great principles which we cannot question, we ought not to hesitate to withhold from it our belief. I am surer that my rational nature is from God, than that any book is an expression of his will. This light in my own breast is his primary revelation, and all subsequent ones must accord with it, and are in fact intended to blend with and brighten it. My hearers, as you value Christianity, never speak of it as in any thing opposed to man's rational nature. Join not its foes in casting on it this re-

proach. It was given, not to supersede our rational faculties, but to quicken and invigorate them, to open a wider field to thought, to bring peace into the intellect as well as into the heart, to give harmony to all our views. We grievously wrong Christianity by supposing it to raise a standard against reason or to demand the sacrifice of our noblest faculties. These are her allies, friends, kindred. With these she holds unalterable concord. Whenever doctrines are taught you from the Christian records, opposing any clear conviction of reason and conscience, be assured, that it is not the teaching of Christ which you hear. Some rash human expounder is substituting his own weak, discordant tones for the voice of God, which they no more resemble than the rattling chariot-wheel does Heaven's awful thunder. — Never, never do violence to your rational nature. He who in any case admits doctrines which contradict reason, has broken down the great barrier between truth and falsehood, and lays open his mind to every delusion. The great mark of error, which is inconsistency, ceases to shock him. He has violated the first law of the intellect, and must pay the fearful penalty. Happy will it be for him, if, by the renunciation of reason, he be not prepared for the opposite extreme, and do not, through a natural reaction, rush into the excess of incredulity. In the records of individuals and of the race, it is not uncommon for an era of intellectual prostration to be followed by an era of proud and licentious philosophy; nor will this alternation cease to form the history of the human mind, till the just rights of reason be revered.

I will notice one more form, and a very common one, in which the duty of denying reason is urged. We are told that there is one case, in which we ought to prostrate our understandings, and that is, the case of mysteries, whenever they are taught in the word of God. The answer to this popular language is short. *Mysteries, continuing such*, cannot, from their very nature, be believed, and of consequence reason incurs no blame in refusing them assent. This will appear by considering what a mystery is. In the language of Scripture, and in its true sense, it is a secret, something unknown. I say, then, that from its nature it cannot be an object of belief; for to know and to believe are expressions of the same act of the mind, differing chiefly in this, that the former is more applicable to what admits of demonstration, the latter to probable truth. I have no disposition to deny the existence of mysteries. Every truth involves them. Every object which falls under our notice, the most common and simple, contains much that we do not know and cannot now penetrate. We know not, for example, what it is which holds together the particles of the meanest stone beneath our feet, nor the manner in which the humblest plant grows. That there are mysteries, secrets, things unknown without number, I should be the last to deny. I only maintain, and in so doing I utter an identical proposition, that what is mysterious, secret, unknown, cannot at the same time be known or an object of faith. It is a great and common error, to confound facts which we understand, with the mysteries which lurk under them, and to suppose that in believing the first we *believe the last*. But no two things are more distinct, nor

does the most thorough knowledge of the one imply the least perception of the other. For example, my hand is moved by the act of my will. This is a plain fact. The words which convey it are among the most intelligible. I believe it without doubt. But under this fact, which I so well know, lies a great mystery. The *manner* in which the will acts on the hand, or the process which connects them, is altogether unknown. The fact and the mystery, as you see, have nothing in common. The former is so manifest, that I cannot, if I would, withhold from it my faith. Of the latter not even a glimpse is afforded me ; not an idea of it has dawned on the mind ; and without ideas, there can, of course, be no knowledge or belief. These remarks apply to revelation as well as to nature. The subjects of which revelation treats, God, Christ, human nature, holiness, heaven, contain infinite mysteries. What is revealed in regard to them is indeed as nothing compared with what remains secret. But “secret things belong to God,” and the pride of reason is manifested, not in declining, but in professing, to make them objects of faith. — It is the influence of time and of intellectual improvement to bring mysteries to light, both in nature and religion ; and just as far as this process goes on, the belief of them becomes possible and right. Thus, the cause of eclipses, which was once a mystery, is now disclosed, and who of us does not believe it ? In like manner Christ revealed “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” or the purposes and methods of God which had been kept secret for ages, in relation to the redemption of the world from sin, death, and woe. Being now revealed, or having ceased to be mysteries,

these have become objects of faith, and reason ranks them among its most glorious truths.

From what has been said, we see, that to deny reason is no part of religion. Never imagine yourselves called to prostrate and condemn this noble nature. Reverence conscience. Foster, extend, enlighten intellect. Never imagine that you are forsaking God, in reposing a trust in the faculties he has given you. Only exercise them with impartiality, disinterestedness, and a supreme love of truth, and their instructions will conspire with revelation, and a beautiful harmony will more and more manifest itself in the lessons which God's book and God's works, which Christ and conscience teach.

But, if Reason and Conscience are not to be denied, what is ? I answer, that there are other principles in our nature. Man is not wholly reason and conscience. He has various appetites, passions, desires, resting on present gratification and on outward objects ; some of which we possess in common with inferior animals, such as sensual appetites, and anger, and others belong more to the mind, such as love of power, love of honor, love of property, love of society, love of amusement, or a taste for literature and elegant arts ; but all referring to our present being, and terminating chiefly on ourselves, or on a few beings who are identified with ourselves. These are to be denied or renounced ; by which I mean not exterminated, but renounced as masters, guides, lords, and brought into strict and entire subordination to our moral and intellectual powers. *It is a false idea, that religion requires the extermination*

of any principle, desire, appetite, or passion, which our Creator has implanted. Our nature is a whole, a beautiful whole, and no part can be spared. You might as properly and innocently lop off a limb from the body, as eradicate any natural desire from the mind. All our appetites are in themselves innocent and useful, ministering to the general weal of the soul. They are like the elements of the natural world, parts of a wise and beneficent system, but, like those elements, are beneficent only when restrained.

There are two remarks relating to our appetites and desires, which will show their need of frequent denial and constant control. In the first place, it is true of them all, that they do not carry within themselves their own rule. They are blind impulses. Present their objects, and they are excited as easily when gratification would be injurious as when it would be useful. We are not so constituted, for example, that we hunger and thirst for those things only which will be nutritive and wholesome, and lose all hunger and thirst at the moment when we have eaten or drunk enough. We are not so made, that the desire of property springs up only when property can be gained by honest means, and that it declines and dies as soon as we have acquired a sufficiency for ourselves and for usefulness. Our desires are undiscerning instincts, generally directed to what is useful, but often clamoring for gratification, which would injure health, debilitate the mind, or oppose the general good; and this blindness of desire makes the demand for self-denial urgent and continual.

I pass to a second remark. Our appetites and desires carry with them a principle of growth or tendency to enlargement. They expand by indulgence, and, if not restrained, they fill and exhaust the soul, and hence are to be strictly watched over and denied. Nature has set bounds to the desires of the brute, but not to human desire, which partakes of the illimitableness of the soul to which it belongs. In brutes, for example, the animal appetites impel to a certain round of simple gratifications, beyond which they never pass. But man, having imagination and invention, is able by these noble faculties to whet his sensual desires indefinitely. He is able to form new combinations of animal pleasures, and to provoke appetite by stimulants. The East gives up its spices, and the South holds not back its vintage. Sea and land are rifled for luxuries. Whilst the animal finds its nourishment in a few plants, perhaps in a single blade, man's table groans under the spoils of all regions ; and the consequence is, that in not a few cases the whole strength of the soul runs into appetite, just as some rich soil shoots up into poisonous weeds, and man, the rational creature of God, degenerates into the most thorough sensualist. — As another illustration of the tendency of our desires to grow and usurp the whole mind, take the love of property. We see this every day gaining dangerous strength, if left to itself, if not denied or curbed. It is a thirst which is inflamed by the very copiousness of its draughts. Anxiety grows with possession. Riches become dearer by time. The love of money, far from withering in life's winter, strikes deeper and deeper root in the heart of age.

He who has more than he can use or manage, grows more and more eager and restless for new gains, muses by day and dreams by night of wealth ; and in this way the whole vigor of his soul, of intellect and affection, shoots up into an intense, unconquerable, and almost infinite passion for accumulation.

It is an interesting and solemn reflection, that the very nobleness of human nature may become the means and instrument of degradation. The powers which ally us to God, when pressed into the service of desire and appetite, enlarge desire into monstrous excess, and irritate appetite into fury. The rapidity of thought, the richness of imagination, the resources of invention, when enslaved to any passion, give it an extent and energy unknown to inferior natures ; and just in proportion as this usurper establishes its empire over us, all the nobler attainments and products of the soul perish. Truth, virtue, honor, religion, hope, faith, charity, die. Here we see the need of self-denial. The lower principles of our nature not only act blindly, but, if neglected, grow indefinitely, and overshadow and blight and destroy every better growth. Without self-restraint and self-denial, the proportion, order, beauty, and harmony of the spiritual nature are subverted, and the soul becomes as monstrous and deformed, as the body would become, were all the nutriment to flow into a few organs and these the least valuable, and to break out into loathsome excrescences, whilst the eye, the ear, and the active limbs should pine, and be palsied, and leave us without guidance or power.

Do any of you now ask, how it comes to pass that we are so constituted ; why we are formed with desires so blind and strong, and tending so constantly to enlargement and dominion ; and how we can reconcile this constitution with God's goodness ? This is our second question. Some will answer it, by saying, that this constitution is a sinful nature derived from our first parents ; that it comes not from God, but from Adam ; that it is a sad inheritance from the first fallen pair ; and that God is not to be blamed for it, but our original progenitor. But, I confess, this explanation does not satisfy me. Scripture says, it was God who made me, not Adam. What I was at birth, I was by the ordinance of God. Make the connexion between Adam and his posterity as close as you will, God must have intended it, and God has carried it into effect. My soul, at the moment of its creation, was as fresh from the hands of the Deity, as if no human parent had preceded me ; and I see not how to shift off on any other being the reproach of my nature, if it deserve reproach. But does it merit blame ? Is the tendency to excess and growth, which we are conscious of in our passions and appetites, any derogation from the goodness or wisdom of our Maker ? Can we find only evil in such a constitution ? Perhaps it may minister to the highest purpose of God.

It is true, that as we are now made, our appetites and desires often war against reason, conscience, and religion. But why is this warfare appointed ? Not to extinguish these high principles ; but to awaken and invigorate them. It is meant to give them a field for action, occasion for effort, and means of

victory. True, virtue is thus opposed and endangered ; but virtue owes its vigor and hardihood to obstacles, and wins its crown by conflict. I do not say, that God can find no school for character but temptation, and trial, and strong desire ; but I do say, that the present state is a fit and noble school. You, my hearers, would have the path of virtue, from the very beginning, smooth and strewed with flowers ; and would this train the soul to energy ? You would have pleasure always coincide with duty ; and how then would you attest your loyalty to duty ? You would have conscience and desire always speak the same language, and prescribe the same path ; and how then would conscience assert its supremacy ? God has implanted blind desires, which often rise up against reason and conscience, that he may give to these high faculties the dignity of dominion and the joy of victory. He has surrounded us with rivals to himself, that we may love him freely, and by our own unfettered choice erect his throne in our souls. He has given us strong desires of inferior things, that the desire of excellence may grow stronger than all. Make such a world as you wish, let no appetite or passion ever resist God's will, no object of desire ever come in competition with duty ; and where would be the resolution, and energy, and constancy, and effort, and purity, the trampling under foot of low interests, the generous self-surrender, the heroic devotion, all the sublimities of virtue, which now throw lustre over man's nature and speak of his immortality ? You would blot the precept of self-denial from the Scriptures, and the need of it from human life, and, in so doing, you would blot out almost

every interesting passage in man's history. Let me ask you, when you read that history, what is it which most interests and absorbs you, which seizes on the imagination and memory, which agitates the soul to its centre? Who is the man whom you select from the records of time as the object of your special admiration? Is it he, who lived to indulge himself? whose current of life flowed most equably and pleasurable? whose desires were crowned most liberally with means of gratification? whose table was most luxuriantly spread? and whom fortune made the envy of his neighbourhood by the fullness of her gifts? Were such the men to whom monuments have been reared, and whose memories, freshened with tears of joy and reverence, grow and flourish and spread through every age? O no! He whom we love, whose honor we most covet, is he who has most denied and subdued himself; who has made the most entire sacrifice of appetites and passions and private interest to God, and virtue, and mankind; who has walked in a rugged path, and clung to good and great ends in persecution and pain; who, amidst the solicitations of ambition, ease, and private friendship, and the menaces of tyranny and malice, has listened to the voice of conscience, and found a recompense for blighted hopes and protracted suffering in conscious uprightness and the favor of God. Who is it that is most lovely in domestic life? It is the Martyr to domestic affection, the mother forgetting herself, and ready to toil, suffer, die for the happiness and virtue of her children. Who is it that we honor in public life? It is the Martyr to his country, he who serves her, not when she has honors

for his brow and wealth for his coffers, but who clings to her in her danger and falling glories, and thinks life a cheap sacrifice to her safety and freedom. Whom does the church retain in most grateful remembrance, and pronounce holy and blessed? The self-denying, self-immolating apostle, the fearless confessor, the devoted martyr, men who have held fast the truth even in death, and bequeathed it to future ages amidst blood. Above all, to what moment of the life of Jesus does the Christian turn, as the most affecting and sublime illustration of his divine character? It is that moment, when, in the spirit of self-sacrifice, denying every human passion, and casting away every earthly interest, he bore the agony and shame of the cross. Thus all great virtues bear the impress of self-denial; and were God's present constitution of our nature and life so reversed as to demand no renunciation of desire, the chief interest and glory of our present being would pass away. There would be nothing in history to thrill us with admiration. We should have no consciousness of the power and greatness of the soul. We should love feebly and coldly, for we should find nothing in one another to love earnestly. Let us not then complain of Providence because it has made self-denial necessary; or complain of religion because it summons us to this work. Religion and nature here hold one language. Our own souls bear witness to the teaching of Christ, that it is the "narrow way" of self-denial "which leadeth unto life."

My friends, at death, if reason is spared to us and memory retains its hold on the past, will it gratify us to see, that we have lived, not to deny, but to indulge

ourselves, that we **have** bowed our souls to any passion, that we gave the reins to lust, that we were palsied by sloth, that, through love of gain, we hardened ourselves against the claims of humanity, or, through love of man's favor, parted with truth and moral independence, or that in any thing reason and conscience were sacrificed to the impulse of desire, and God forgotten for present good? Shall we then find comfort in remembering our tables of luxury, our pillows of down, our wealth amassed and employed for private ends, or our honors won by base compliance with the world? Did any man at his death ever regret his conflicts with himself, his victories over appetite, his scorn of impure pleasures, or his sufferings for righteousness' sake? Did any man ever mourn, that he had impoverished himself by integrity, or worn out his frame in the service of mankind? Are these the recollections which harrow the soul, and darken and appall the last hour? To whom is the last hour most serene and full of hope? Is it not to him, who, amidst perils and allurements, has denied himself, and taken up the cross with the holy resolution of Jesus Christ?

DISCOURSE VI.

MATTHEW xvi. 24.

THEN SAID JESUS UNTO HIS DISCIPLES, IF ANY MAN
WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND
TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME.

IN the preceding discourse, I spoke of the just limits and moral dignity of self-denial. I resume the subject, because it throws much light on the nature of true virtue, and helps us to distinguish moral goodness from qualities which resemble it. Clear conceptions on this point are inestimable. To love and seek excellence, we must know what it is, and separate it from counterfeits. For want of just views of virtue and piety, men's admiration and efforts are often wasted, and sometimes carry them wide of the great object of human life. Perhaps the truth on this subject cannot be brought out more clearly than by considering the nature of Self-denial. Such will be the aim of this discourse.

To deny ourselves is to deny, to withstand, to renounce whatever, within or without, interferes with our conviction of right, or with the will of God. It is to suffer, to make sacrifices, for duty or our principles. The question now offers itself, What constitutes the singular merit of this suffering? Mere suffering, we all

know, is not virtue. Evil men often endure pain as well as the good, and are evil still. This and this alone constitutes the worth and importance of the sacrifice, suffering, which enters into self-denial, that it springs from and manifests Moral Strength, power over ourselves, force of purpose, or the mind's resolute determination of itself to duty. It is the proof and result of inward energy. Difficulty, hardship, suffering, sacrifices, are tests and measures of Moral Force, and the great means of its enlargement. To withstand these is the same thing as to put forth power. Self-denial, then, is the will acting with power in the choice and prosecution of duty. Here we have the distinguishing glory of self-denial, and here we have the essence and distinction of a good and virtuous man.

The truth to which these views lead us, and which I am now solicitous to enforce, is this, that the great characteristic of a virtuous or religious mind is strength of Moral purpose. This force is the measure of excellence. The very idea of Duty implies that we are bound to adopt and pursue it with a stronger and more settled determination than any other object, and virtue consists in fidelity to this primary dictate of conscience. We have virtue only as far as we exert inward energy, or as far as we put forth a strong and overcoming will in obeying the law of God and of our own minds. Let this truth be deeply felt. Let us not confide in good emotions, in kind feelings, in tears for the suffering, or in admiration of noble deeds. These are not goodness, in the moral and Christian sense of that word. It is force of upright and holy purpose,

attested and approved by withstanding trial, temptation, allurements, and suffering ; it is this, in which virtue consists. I know nothing else which an enlightened conscience approves, nothing else which God will accept.

I am aware, that if I were called upon to state my ideas of a perfect character, I should give an answer, that would seem at first to contradict the doctrine just expressed, or to be inconsistent with the stress which I have laid on strength of moral purpose. I should say, that perfection of mind, like that of the body, consists of two elements, of strength and beauty ; that it consists of firmness and mildness, of force and tenderness, of vigor and grace. It would ill become a teacher of Christianity to overlook the importance of sympathy, gentleness, humility, and charity, in his definition of moral excellence. The amiable, attractive, mild attributes of the mind are recommended as of great price in the sight of God by Him who was emphatically meek and lowly in heart. Still I must say, that all virtue lies in strength of character or of moral purpose ; for these gentle, sweet, winning qualities rise into virtue only when pervaded and sustained by moral energy. On this they must rest, by this they must be controlled and exalted, or they have no moral worth.


I acknowledge love, kindness, to be a great virtue ; but what do I mean by love, when I thus speak ? Do I mean a constitutional tenderness ? an instinctive sympathy ? the natural and almost necessary attachment to friends and benefactors ? the kindness which is inseparable from our social state, and which is never wholly extinguished in the human breast ? In all these

meotions of our nature, I see the kind design of God ; I see a beauty ; I see the germ and capacity of an ever-growing charity. But they are not virtues, they are not proper objects of moral approbation, nor do they give any sure pledge of improvement. This natural amiableness I too often see in company with sloth, with uselessness, with the contemptible vanity and dissipation of fashionable life. It is no ground of trust, no promise of fidelity, in any of the great exigencies of life. The love, the benevolence, which I honor as virtue, is not the gift of nature or condition, but the growth and manifestation of the soul's moral power. It is a spirit chosen as excellent, cherished as divine, protected with a jealous care, and especially fortified by the resistance and subjection of opposite propensities. It is the soul, determining itself to break every chain of selfishness, to enlarge and to invigorate the kind affections, to identify itself with other beings, to sympathize, not with a few, but with all the living and rational children of God, to honor others' worth, to increase and enjoy their happiness, to partake in the universal goodness of the Creator, and to put down within itself every motion of pride, anger, or sensual desire, inconsistent with this pure charity. In other words, it is strength of holy purpose, infused into the kind affections, which raises them into virtues, or gives them a moral worth, not found in constitutional amiableness.

I read in the Scriptures the praises of meekness. But when I see a man meek or patient of injury through tameness, or insensibility, or want of self-respect, passively gentle, meek through constitution

or fear, I look on him with feelings very different from veneration. It is the meekness of principle ; it is mildness replete with energy ; it is the forbearance of a man who feels a wrong, but who curbs anger, who though injured resolves to be just, who voluntarily remembers that his foe is a man and a brother, who dreads to surrender himself to his passions, who in the moment of provocation subjects himself to reason and religion, and who holds fast the great truth, that the noblest victory over a foe is to disarm and subdue him by equity and kindness, — it is this meekness which I venerate, and which seems to me one of the divinest virtues. It is moral power, the strength of virtuous purpose, pervading meekness, which gives it all its title to respect.

It is worthy of special remark, that without this moral energy, resisting passion and impulse, our tenderest attachments degenerate more or less into weaknesses and immoralities ; sometimes prompting us to sympathize with those whom we love, in their errors, prejudices, and evil passions ; sometimes inciting us to heap upon them injurious praises and indulgences ; sometimes urging us to wrong or neglect others, that we may the more enjoy or serve our favorites ; and sometimes poisoning our breasts with jealousy or envy, because our affection is not returned with equal warmth. The principle of love, whether exercised towards our relatives or our country, whether manifested in courtesy or compassion ; can only become virtue, can only acquire purity, consistency, serenity, dignity, when imbued, swayed, cherished, enlarged by the power of a virtuous will, by a self-denying



energy. It is Inward Force, power over ourselves, which is the beginning and the end of virtue.

What I have now said of the kind affections is equally true of the religious ones. These have virtue in them, only as far as they are imbued with self-denying strength. I know that multitudes place religion in feeling. Ardent sensibility is the measure of piety. He who is wrought up by preaching or sympathy into extraordinary fervor, is a saint ; and the less he governs himself in his piety, the more he is looked upon as inspired. But I know of no religion, which has moral worth, or is acceptable to God, but that which grows from and is nourished by our own spiritual, self-denying energy. Emotion towards God, springing up without our own thought or care, grateful feelings at the reception of signal benefits, the swelling of the soul at the sight of nature, tenderness awakened by descriptions of the love and cross of Christ, these, though showing high capacities, though means and materials of piety, are not *of themselves* acceptable religion. The religious character which has true virtue, and which is built upon a rock, is that which has been deliberately and resolutely adopted and cherished, as our highest duty, and as the friend and strengthener of all other duties ; and which we have watched over and confirmed by suppressing inconsistent desires and passions, by warring against selfishness and the love of the world.

There is one fact very decisive on this subject. It is not uncommon to see people with strong religious feeling, who are not made better by it ; who at church *or in other meetings* are moved perhaps to tears, but

who make no progress in self-government or charity, and who gain nothing of elevation of mind in their common feelings and transactions. They take pleasure in religious excitement, just as others delight to be interested by a fiction or a play. They invite these emotions because they suppose them to aid or ensure salvation, and soon relapse into their ordinary sordidness or other besetting infirmities. Now to give the name of Religion to this mockery is the surest way to dishonor it. True religion is not mere emotion, is not something communicated to us without our own moral effort. It involves much self-denial. Its great characteristic is, not feeling, but the subjection of our wills, desires habits, lives, to the will of God, from a conviction that what he wills is the perfection of virtue, and the true happiness of our nature. In genuine piety the mind chooses, as its supreme good, the moral excellence enjoined by its Author, and resolutely renounces whatever would sully this divine image, and so disturb its communion with God. This religion, though its essence be not emotion, will gradually gather and issue in a sensibility, deeper, intenser, more glowing, than the blind enthusiast ever felt; and then only does it manifest itself in its perfect form, when, through a self-denying and self-purifying power, it rises to an overflowing love, gratitude, and joy towards the Universal Father.

In insisting on the great principle, that religion, or virtue, consists in strength of moral purpose, in the soul's resolute determination of itself to duty, I am satisfied that I express a truth, which has a witness and confirmation in the breast of every reflecting man.

We all of us, feel that virtue is not something adopted from necessity, something to which feeling impels us, something which comes to us from constitution, or accident, or outward condition ; but that it has its origin in our moral freedom, that it consists in moral energy ; and accordingly we all measure virtue by the trials and difficulties which it overcomes, for these are the tests and measures of the force with which the soul adopts it. Every one of us, who has adhered to duty, when duty brought no recompense but the conviction of well-doing, who has faced the perils of a good but persecuted cause with unshrinking courage, who has been conscious of an inward triumph over temptation, conscious of having put down bad motives and exalted good ones in his own breast, must remember the clear, strong, authentic voice, the accents of peculiar encouragement and joy, with which, the inward judge has at such seasons pronounced its approving sentence. This experience is universal, and it is the voice of nature and of God, in confirmation of the great truth of this discourse.

I fear, that the importance of strength in the Christian character has been in some degree obscured, by the habit of calling certain Christian graces of singular worth, by the name of *passive* virtues. This name has been given to humility, patience, resignation ; and I fear, that the phrase has led some to regard these noble qualities as allied to inaction, as wanting energy and determination. Now the truth is, that the mind never puts forth greater power over itself, than when, in great trials, it yields up calmly its desires, affections, interests to God. There are seasons, when to be *still*

demands immeasurably higher strength than to act. Composure is often the highest result of power. Think you it demands no power to calm the stormy elements of passion, to moderate the vehemence of desire, to throw off the load of dejection, to suppress every repining thought, when the dearest hopes are withered, and to turn the wounded spirit from dangerous reveries and wasting grief, to the quiet discharge of ordinary duties? Is there no power put forth, when a man, stripped of his property, of the fruits of a life's labors, quells discontent and gloomy forebodings, and serenely and patiently returns to the tasks which Providence assigns? I doubt not, that the all-seeing eye of God sometimes discerns the sublimest human energy under a form and countenance, which by their composure and tranquillity indicate to the human spectator only passive virtues.

The doctrine of this discourse is in every view interesting. To me it goes further than all others to explain the present state. If moral strength, if inward power in the choice and practice of duty, constitute excellence and happiness, then I see why we are placed in a world of obstructions, perils, hardships, why duty is so often a "narrow way," why the warfare of the passions with conscience is so subtle and unceasing; why within and without us are so many foes to rectitude; for this is the very state to call forth and to build up moral force. In a world where duty and inclination should perfectly agree, we should indeed never err, but the living power of virtue could not be developed. Do not complain, then, of life's trials. Through these you may gain

incomparably higher good, than indulgence and ease. This view reveals to us the impartial goodness of God in the variety of human conditions. We sometimes see individuals, whose peculiar trials are thought to make their existence to them an evil. But among such may be found the most favored children of God. If there be a man on earth to be envied, it is he, who, amidst the sharpest assaults from his own passions, from fortune, from society, never falters in his allegiance to God and the inward monitor. So peculiar is the excellence of this moral strength, that I believe the Creator regards one being who puts it forth, with greater complacency than he would look on a world of beings, innocent and harmless, through the necessity of constitution. I know not, that human wisdom has arrived at a juster or higher view of the present state, than that it is intended to call forth power by obstruction, the power of intellect by the difficulties of knowledge, the power of conscience and virtue by temptation, allurements, pleasure, pain, and the alternations of prosperous and adverse life. When I see a man holding faster his uprightness in proportion as it is assailed, fortifying his religious trust in proportion as Providence is obscure; hoping in the ultimate triumphs of virtue, more surely in proportion to its present afflictions; cherishing philanthropy amidst the discouraging experience of men's unkindness and unthankfulness; extending to others a sympathy which his own sufferings need, but cannot obtain; growing milder and gentler amidst what tends to exasperate and harden; and through inward principle converting the very

incitements to evil into the occasions of a victorious virtue,—I see an explanation, and a noble explanation, of the present state. I see a good produced, so transcendent in its nature, as to justify all the evil and suffering, under which it grows up. I should think the formation of a few such minds worth all the apparatus of the present world. I should say, that this earth, with its continents and oceans, its seasons and harvests, and its successive generations, was a work worthy of God, even were it to accomplish no other end than the training and manifestation of the illustrious characters which are scattered through history. And when I consider, how small a portion of human virtue is recorded by history, how superior in dignity, as well as in number, are the unnoticed, unhonored saints and heroes of domestic and humble life, I see a light thrown over the present state which more than reconciles me to all its evils.

The views given in this discourse of the importance of moral power, manifested in great trials, may be employed to shed a glorious and perhaps a new light on the character and cross of Christ. But this topic can now be only suggested to your private meditation. There is, however, one practical application of our subject, which may be made in a few words, and which I cannot omit. I wish to ask the young, who hear me, and especially of my own sex, to use the views now offered in judging and forming their characters. Young man, remember that the only test of goodness, virtue, is moral strength, self-denying energy. You have generous and honorable feelings, you

scorn mean actions, your heart beats quick at the sight or hearing of courageous, disinterested deeds, and all these are interesting qualities ; but, remember, they are the gifts of nature, the endowments of your susceptible age. They are not virtue. God and the inward monitor ask for more. The question is, Do you strive to confirm, into permanent principles, the generous sensibilities of the heart ? Are you watchful to suppress the impetuous emotions, the resentments, the selfish passionateness, which are warring against your honorable feelings ? Especially do you subject to your moral and religious convictions, the love of pleasure, the appetites, the passions, which form the great trials of youthful virtue ? Here is the field of conflict to which youth is summoned. Trust not to occasional impulses of benevolence, to constitutional courage, frankness, kindness, if you surrender yourselves basely to the temptations of your age. No man who has made any observation of life, but will tell you how often he has seen the promise of youth blasted ; intellect, genius, honorable feeling, kind affection, overpowered and almost extinguished, through the want of moral strength, through a tame yielding to pleasure and the passions. Place no trust in your good propensities, unless these are fortified, and upheld, and improved by moral energy and self-control. — To all of us, in truth, the same lesson comes. If any man will be Christ's disciple, sincerely good, and worthy to be named among the friends of virtue, if he will have inward peace and the consciousness of progress towards Heaven, he must deny himself, he must take *the cross*, and follow in the renunciation of every gain and pleasure inconsistent with the will of God.

DISCOURSE VII.

1 PETER ii. 21.

CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED FOR US, LEAVING US AN EXAMPLE, THAT YE SHOULD FOLLOW HIS STEPS.

THE example of Jesus is our topic. To incite you to follow it, is the aim of this discourse. Christ came to give us a religion,—but this is not all. By a wise and beautiful ordination of Providence, he was sent to show forth his religion in himself. He did not come to sit in a hall of legislation; and from some commanding eminence to pronounce laws and promises. He is not a mere channel, through which certain communications are made from God; not a mere messenger, appointed to utter the words which he had heard, and then to disappear, and to sustain no further connexion with his message. He came not only to teach with his lips, but to be a living manifestation of his religion,—to be, in an important sense, the religion itself.

This is a peculiarity worthy of attention. Christianity is not a mere code of laws, not an abstract system, such as theologians frame. It is a living, embodied religion. It comes to us in a human form; it offers itself to our eyes as well as ears; it breathes, it moves in our sight. It is more than precept; it is example and action.

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The importance of example, who does not understand? How much do most of us suffer from the presence, conversation, spirit, of men of low minds, by whom we are surrounded. The temptation is strong to take, as our standard, the average character of the society in which we live, and to satisfy ourselves with decencies and attainments which secure to us among the multitude the name of respectable men. On the other hand, there is a power (have you not felt it?) in the presence, conversation, and example of a man of strong principle and magnanimity, to lift us, at least for the moment, from our vulgar and tame habits of thought, and to kindle some generous aspirations after the excellence which we were made to attain. I hardly need say to you, that it is impossible to place ourselves under any influence of this nature so quickening as the example of Jesus. This introduces us to the highest order of virtues. This is fitted to awaken the whole mind. Nothing has equal power to neutralize the coarse, selfish, and sensual influences, amidst which we are plunged, to refine our conception of duty, and to reveal to us the perfection on which our hopes and most strenuous desires should habitually fasten.

There is one cause, which has done much to defeat this good influence of Christ's character and example, and which ought to be exposed. It is this. Multitudes, I am afraid great multitudes, think of Jesus as a being to be admired, rather than approached. They have some vague conceptions of a glory in his nature and character which makes it presumption to think of proposing him as their standard. He is thrown so far from them, that he does them little good. Many feel,

that a close resemblance to Jesus Christ is not to be expected ; that this, like many other topics, may serve for declamation in the pulpit, but is utterly incapable of being reduced to practice. I think I am touching here an error, which exerts a blighting influence on not a few minds. Until men think of the religion and character of Christ as truly applicable to them, as intended to be brought into continual operation, as what they must incorporate with their whole spiritual nature, they will derive little good from Christ. Men think indeed to honor Jesus, when they place him so high as to discourage all effort to approach him. They really degrade him. They do not understand his character ; they throw a glare over it, which hides its true features. This vague admiration is the poorest tribute which they can pay him.

The manner in which Jesus Christ is conceived and spoken of by many, reminds me of what is often seen in Catholic countries, where a superstitious priesthood and people imagine that they honor the Virgin Mary by loading her image with sparkling jewels and the gaudiest attire. A Protestant of an uncorrupted taste is at first shocked, as if there were something like profanation in thus decking out, as for a theatre, the meek, modest, gentle, pure, and tender mother of Jesus. It seems to me that something of the same superstition is seen in the indefinite epithets of admiration heaped upon Jesus ; and the effect is, that the mild and simple beauty of his character is not seen. Its sublimity, which had nothing gaudy or dazzling, which was plain and unaffected, is not felt, and its suitability as an example to mankind is discredited or denied.

I wish, in this discourse, to prevent the discouraging influence of the greatness of Jesus Christ, to show that, however exalted, he is not placed beyond the reach of our sympathy and imitation.

I begin with the general observation, that real greatness of character, greatness of the highest order, far from being repulsive and discouraging, is singularly accessible and imitable, and, instead of severing a being from others, fits him to be their friend and model. A man who stands apart from his race, who has few points of contact with other men, who has a style and manner which strike awe, and keep others far from him, whatever rank he may hold in his own and others' eyes, wants, after all, true grandeur of mind ; and the spirit of this remark, I think, may be extended beyond men to higher orders of beings, to angels and to Jesus Christ. A great soul is known by its enlarged, strong, and tender sympathies. True elevation of mind does not take a being out of the circle of those who are below him, but binds him faster to them, and gives them advantages for a closer attachment and conformity to him.

Greatness of character is a communicable attribute ; I should say, singularly communicable. It has nothing exclusive in its nature. It cannot be the monopoly of an individual, for it is the enlarged and generous action of faculties and affections which enter into and constitute all minds, I mean reason, conscience, and love, so that its elements exist in all. It is not a peculiar or exclusive knowledge, which can be shut up in one or a few understandings ; but the comprehension of great and universal truths, which are the proper


objects of every rational being. It is not a devotion to peculiar, exclusive objects, but the adoption of public interests, the consecration of the mind to the cause of virtue and happiness in the creation, that is, to the very cause which all intelligent beings are bound to espouse. Greatness is not a secret, solitary principle, working by itself and refusing participation, but frank and open-hearted, so large in its views, so liberal in its feelings, so expansive in its purposes, so beneficent in its labors, as naturally and necessarily to attract sympathy and coöperation. It is selfishness that repels men; and true greatness has not a stronger characteristic than its freedom from every selfish taint. So far from being imprisoned in private interests, it covets nothing which it may not impart. So far from being absorbed in its own distinctions, it discerns nothing so quickly and joyfully as the capacities and pledges of greatness in others, and counts no labor so noble as to call forth noble sentiments, and the consciousness of a divine power, in less improved minds.

I know that those who call themselves great on earth, are apt to estrange themselves from their inferiors; and the multitude, cast down by their high bearing, never think of proposing them as examples. But this springs wholly from the low conceptions of those whom we call the great, and shows a mixture of vulgarity of mind with their superior endowments. Genuine greatness is marked by simplicity, unostentatiousness, self-forgetfulness, a hearty interest in others, a feeling of brotherhood with the human family, and a respect for every intellectual and immortal being as capable of progress towards its own elevation. A superior mind,

enlightened and kindled by just views of God and of the creation, regards its gifts and powers as so many bonds of union with other beings, as given it, not to nourish self-elation, but to be employed for others, and still more to be communicated to others. Such greatness has no reserve, and especially no affected dignity of deportment. It is too conscious of its own power to need, and too benevolent to desire, to entrench itself behind forms and ceremonies ; and when circumstances permit such a character to manifest itself to inferior beings, it is beyond all others the most winning, and most fitted to impart itself, or to call forth a kindred elevation of feeling. I know not in history an individual so easily comprehended as Jesus Christ, for nothing is so intelligible as sincere, disinterested love. I know not any being who is so fitted to take hold on all orders of minds ; and accordingly he drew after him the unenlightened, the publican, and the sinner. It is a sad mistake, then, that Jesus Christ is too great to allow us to think of intimacy with him, and to think of making him our standard.

Let me confirm this truth by another order of reflections. You tell me, my hearers, that Jesus Christ is so high, that he cannot be your model ; I grant the exaltation of his character. I believe him to be a more than human being. In truth, all Christians so believe him. Those who suppose him not to have existed before his birth, do not regard him as a mere man, though so reproached. They always separate him by broad distinctions from other men. They consider him as enjoying a communion with God, and as

having received gifts, endowments, aids, lights from Him, granted to no other, and as having exhibited a spotless purity, which is the highest distinction of Heaven. All admit, and joyfully admit, that Jesus Christ, by his greatness and goodness, throws all other human attainments into obscurity. But on this account he is not less a standard, nor is he to discourage us, but on the contrary to breathe into us a more exhilarating hope; for though so far above us, he is still one of us, and is only an illustration of the capacities which we all possess. This is a great truth. Let me strive to unfold it. Perhaps I cannot better express my views, than by saying, that I regard all minds as of one family. When we speak of higher orders of beings, of angels and archangels, we are apt to conceive of distinct kinds or races of beings, separated from us and from each other by impassable barriers. But it is not so. All minds are of one family. There is no such partition in the spiritual world as you see in the material. In material nature, you see wholly distinct classes of beings. A mineral is not a vegetable, and makes no approach to it; these two great kingdoms of nature are divided by immeasurable spaces. So, when we look at different races of animals, though all partake of that mysterious property, life, yet what an immense and impassable distance is there between the insect and the lion. They have no bond of union, no possibility of communication. During the lapse of ages, the animalcules which sport in the sunbeams a summer's day and then perish, have made no approximation to the king of the forests. But in the intellectual world




there are no such barriers. All minds are essentially of one origin, one nature, kindled from one divine flame, and are all tending to one centre, one happiness. This great truth, to us the greatest of truths, which lies at the foundation of all religion and of all hope, seems to me not only sustained by proofs which satisfy the reason, but to be one of the deep instincts of our nature. It mingles, unperceived, with all our worship of God, which uniformly takes for granted that he is a mind having thought, affection, and volition like ourselves. It runs through false religions ; and whilst, by its perversion, it has made them false, it has also given to them whatever purifying power they possess. But, passing over this instinct, which is felt more and more to be unerring, as the intellect is improved, this great truth of the unity or likeness of all minds seems to me demonstrable from this consideration, that Truth, the object and nutriment of mind, is one and immutable, so that the whole family of intelligent beings must have the same views, the same motives, and the same general ends. For example, a truth of mathematics is not, a truth only in this world, a truth to our minds, but a truth every where, a truth in heaven, a truth to God, who has indeed framed his creation according to the laws of this universal science. So happiness and misery, which lie at the foundation of morals, must be to all intelligent beings what they are to us, the objects, one of desire and hope, and the other of aversion ; and who can doubt that virtue and vice are the same every where as on earth, that, in every community of beings, the mind which devotes itself to the general weal, must be more revered than a mind

which would subordinate the general interest to its own. Thus all souls are one in nature, approach one another, and have grounds and bonds of communion with one another. I am not only one of the human race ; I am one of the great intellectual family of God. There is no spirit so exalted, with which I have not common thoughts and feelings. That conception, which I have gained, of One Universal Father, whose love is the fountain and centre of all things, is the dawn of the highest and most magnificent views in the universe ; and if I look up to this being with filial love, I have the spring and beginning of the noblest sentiments and joys which are known in the universe. No greatness therefore of a being separates me from him, or makes him unapproachable by me. The mind of Jesus Christ, my hearer, and your mind are of one family ; nor was there any thing in his, of which you have not the principle, the capacity, the promise in yourself. This is the very impression which he intends to give. He never held himself up as an inimitable and unapproachable being ; but directly the reverse. He always spoke of himself as having come to communicate himself to others. He always invited men to believe on and adhere to him, that they might receive that very spirit, that pure, celestial spirit, by which he was himself actuated. "Follow me," is his lesson. The relation which he came to establish between himself and mankind, was not that of master and slave, but that of friends. He compares himself, in a spirit of divine benevolence, to a vine, which, you know, sends its own sap, that by which it is itself nourished, into

all its branches. We read too these remarkable words in his prayer for his disciples, "I have given to them the glory thou gavest me;" and I am persuaded that there is not a glory, a virtue, a power, a joy, possessed by Jesus Christ, to which his disciples will not successively rise. In the spirit of these remarks, the Apostles say, "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ."

I have said, that, all minds being of one family, the greatness of the mind of Christ is no discouragement to our adoption of him as our model. I now observe, that there is one attribute of mind, to which I have alluded, that should particularly animate us to propose to ourselves a sublime standard, as sublime as Jesus Christ. I refer to the principle of growth in human nature. We were made to grow. Our faculties are germs, and given for an expansion, to which nothing authorizes as to set bounds. The soul bears the impress of illimitableness, in the thirst, the unquenchable thirst, which it brings with it into being, for a power, knowledge, happiness, which it never gains, and which always carry it forward into futurity. The body soon reaches its limit. But intellect, affection, moral energy, in proportion to their growth, tend to further enlargement, and every acquisition is an impulse to something higher. When I consider this principle or capacity of the human soul, I cannot restrain the hope which it awakens. The partition-walls which imagination has reared between men and higher orders of beings vanish. I no longer see aught to prevent our becoming whatever was good and great in Jesus on earth. In truth I feel my utter inability

to conceive what a mind is to attain which is to advance for ever. Add but that element, eternity, to man's progress, and the results of his existence surpass, not only human, but angelic thought. Give me this, and the future glory of the human mind becomes to me as incomprehensible as God himself. To encourage these thoughts and hopes, our Creator has set before us delightful exemplifications, even now, of this principle of growth both in outward nature and in the human mind. We meet them in nature. Suppose you were to carry a man, wholly unacquainted with vegetation, to the most majestic tree in our forests, and, whilst he was admiring its extent and proportions, suppose you should take from the earth at its root a little downy substance, which a breath might blow away, and say to him, That tree was once such a seed as this ; it was wrapt up here ; it once lived only within these delicate fibres, this narrow compass. With what incredulous wonder would he regard you. And if by an effort of imagination, somewhat Oriental, we should suppose this little seed to be suddenly endued with thought, and to be told that it was one day to become this mighty tree, and to cast out branches, which would spread an equal shade, and wave with equal grace, and withstand the winter winds ; with what amazement may we suppose it to anticipate its future lot. Such growth we witness in nature. A nobler hope we Christians are to cherish ; and still more striking examples of the growth of mind are set before us in human history. We wonder, indeed, when we are told that, one day, we shall be as the angels of God. I apprehend that as great a wonder has been



realized already on the earth. I apprehend that the distance between the mind of Newton and of a Hottentot may have been as great as between Newton and an angel. There is another view still more striking. This Newton, who lifted his calm, sublime eye to the heavens, and read, among the planets and the stars, the great law of the material universe, was, forty or fifty years before, an infant, without one clear perception, and unable to distinguish his nurse's arm from the pillow on which he slept. Howard too, who, under the strength of an all-sacrificing benevolence, explored the depths of human suffering, was, forty or fifty years before, an infant wholly absorbed in himself, grasping at all he saw, and almost breaking his little heart with fits of passion, when the idlest toy was withheld. Has not man already traversed as wide a space as separates him from angels? And why must he stop? There is no extravagance in the boldest anticipation. We may truly become one with Christ, a partaker of that celestial mind. He is truly our brother, one of our family. Let us make him our constant model.

I know not that the doctrine, now laid down, is liable but to one abuse. It may unduly excite susceptible minds, and impel to a vehemence of hope and exertion, unfavorable in the end to the very progress which is proposed. To such, I would say, Hasten to conform yourselves to Christ, but hasten according to the laws of your nature. As the body cannot, by the concentration of its whole strength into one bound, scale the height of a mountain, neither can the mind free every obstacle and achieve perfection by an agony of the will. Great effort is indeed necessary; but

such as can be sustained, such as fits us for greater, such as will accumulate, not exhaust, our spiritual force. The soul may be overstrained as truly as the body, and it often is so, in seasons of extraordinary religious excitement; and the consequence is, an injury to the constitution of the intellect and the heart, which a life may not be able to repair. I rest the hopes for human nature, which I have now expressed, on its principle of growth; and growth, as you well know, is a gradual process, not a convulsive start, accomplishing the work of years in a moment. All great attainments are gradual. As easily might a science be mastered by one struggle of thought, as sin be conquered by a spasm of remorse. Continuous, patient effort, guided by wise deliberation, is the true means of spiritual progress. In religion, as in common life, mere force or vehemence will prove a fallacious substitute for the sobriety of wisdom.

The doctrine which I have chiefly labored to maintain in this discourse, that minds are all of one family, are all brethren, and may be more and more nearly united to God, seems to me to have been felt peculiarly by Jesus Christ; and if I were to point out the distinction of his greatness, I should say it lay in this. He felt his superiority, but he never felt as if it separated him from mankind. He did not come among us, as some great men would visit a colliery, or any other resort of the ignorant and corrupt, with an air of greatness, feeling himself above us, and giving benefits as if it were an infinite condescension. He came and mingled with us as a friend and a brother. He saw

in every human being a mind which might wear his own brightest glory. He was severe only towards one class of men, and they were those who looked down on the multitude with contempt. Jesus respected human nature; he felt it to be his own. This was the greatness of Jesus Christ. He felt, as no other felt, a union of mind with the human race,—felt that all had a spark of that same intellectual and immortal flame which dwelt in himself.

I insist on this view of his character, not only to encourage us to aspire after a likeness to Jesus; I consider it as peculiarly fitted to call forth love towards him. If I regarded Jesus as an august stranger, belonging to an entirely different class of existence from myself, having no common thoughts or feelings with me, and looking down upon me with only such a sympathy as I have with an inferior animal, I should regard him with a vague awe, but the immeasurable space between us would place him beyond friendship and affection. But when I feel, that all minds form one family, that I have the same nature with Jesus, and that he came to communicate to me, by his teaching, example, and intercession, his own mind, to bring me into communion with what was sublimest, purest, happiest in himself, then I can love him as I love no other being, excepting only Him who is the Father alike of Christ and of the Christian. With these views I feel, that, though ascended to Heaven, he is not gone beyond the reach of our hearts; that he has now the same interest in mankind as when he entered their dwellings, sat at their tables, washed their feet; and that there is no being so approachable, none

with whom such unreserved intercourse is to be enjoyed in the future world.

Believing, as I do, that I have now used no inflated language, but have spoken the words of truth and soberness, I exhort you with calmness, but earnestness, to choose and adopt Jesus Christ as your example, with the whole energy of your wills. I exhort you to resolve on following him, not, as perhaps you have done, with a faint and yielding purpose, but with the full conviction, that your whole happiness is concentrated in the force and constancy of your adherence to this celestial guide. My friends, there is no other happiness. Let not the false views of Christianity which prevail in the world, seduce you into the belief, that Christ can bless you in any other way than by assimilating you to his own virtue, than by breathing into you his own mind. Do not imagine that any faith or love towards Jesus can avail you, but that which quickens you to conform yourselves to his spotless purity and unconquerable rectitude. Settle it as an immovable truth, that neither in this world nor in the next can you be happy, but in proportion to the sanctity and elevation of your characters. Let no man imagine, that through the patronage or protection of Jesus Christ or any other being, he can find peace or any sincere good, but in the growth of an enlightened, firm, disinterested, holy mind. Expect no good from Jesus, any farther than you clothe yourselves with his excellence. He can impart to you nothing so precious as himself, as his own mind; and believe me, my hearers, this mind may dwell in you. His sublimest virtues may be yours. Admit, welcome

this great truth. Look up to the illustrious Son of God with the conviction, that you may become one with him in thought, in feeling, in power, in holiness. His character will become a blessing, just as far as it shall awaken in you this consciousness, this hope. The most lamentable skepticism on earth, and incomparably the most common, is a skepticism as to the greatness, powers, and high destinies of human nature. In this greatness I desire to cherish an unwavering faith. Tell me not of the universal corruption of the race. Humanity has already, in not a few instances, borne conspicuously the likeness of Christ and God. The sun grows dim, the grandeur of outward nature shrinks, when compared with the spiritual energy of men, who, in the cause of truth, of God, of charity, have spurned all bribes of ease, pleasure, renown, and have withstood shame, want, persecution, torture, and the most dreaded forms of death. In such men I learn that the soul was made in God's image, and made to conform itself to the loveliness and greatness of his Son.

My Friends, we may all approach Jesus Christ. For all of us he died, to leave us an example that we should follow his steps. By earnest purpose, by self-conflict, by watching and prayer, by faith in the Christian promises, by those heavenly aids and illuminations, which he that seeketh shall find, we may all unite ourselves, in living bonds, to Christ, may love as he loved, may act from his principles, may suffer with his constancy, may enter into his purposes, may sympathize with his self-devotion to the cause of God and mankind, and, by likeness of spirit, may prepare ourselves to *meet him* as our everlasting friend.

DISCOURSE VIII.

PROVERBS xiv. 9.

FOOLS MAKE A MOCK AT SIN.

My aim in this discourse is simple, and may be expressed in a few words. I wish to guard you against thinking lightly of sin. No folly is so monstrous, and yet our exposure to it is great. Breathing an atmosphere tainted with moral evil, seeing and hearing sin in our daily walks, we are in no small danger of overlooking its malignity. This malignity I would set before you with all plainness, believing that the effort which is needed to resist this enemy of our peace, is to be called forth by fixing on it our frequent and serious attention.

I feel as if a difficulty lay at the very threshold of this discussion, which it is worth our while to remove. The word Sin, I apprehend, is to many obscure or not sufficiently plain. It is a word seldom used in common life. It belongs to theology and the pulpit. By not a few people, sin is supposed to be a property of our nature, born with us ; and we sometimes hear of the child as being sinful, before it can have performed any action. From these and other causes, the

word gives to many confused notions. Sin, in its true sense, is the violation of duty, and cannot, consequently, exist, before conscience has begun to act, and before power to obey it is unfolded. To sin is to resist our sense of right, to oppose known obligation, to cherish feelings, or commit deeds, which we know to be wrong. It is to withhold from God the reverence, gratitude, and obedience, which our own consciences pronounce to be due to that great and good Being. It is, to transgress those laws of equity, justice, candor, humanity, disinterestedness, which we all feel to belong and to answer to our various social relations. It is to yield ourselves to those appetites, which we know to be the inferior principles of our nature, to give the body a mastery over the mind, to sacrifice the intellect and heart to the senses, to surrender ourselves to ease and indulgence, or to prefer outward accumulation and power to strength and peace of conscience, to progress towards perfection. Such is sin. It is voluntary wrong-doing. Any gratification injurious to ourselves is sin. Any act injurious to our neighbours is sin. Indifference to our Creator is sin. The transgression of any command which this excellent Being and rightful Sovereign has given us, whether by conscience or revelation, is sin. So broad is this term. It is as extensive as duty. It is not some mysterious thing wrought into our souls at birth. It is not a theological subtilty. It is choosing and acting in opposition to our sense of right, to known obligation.

Now, according to the Scriptures, there is nothing so evil, so deformed, so ruinous as sin. All pain,

poverty, contempt, affliction, ill success, are light and not to be named with it. To do wrong is more pernicious than to incur all the calamities which nature or human malice can heap upon us. According to the Scriptures, I am not to fear those who would kill this body, and have nothing more that they can do. Such enemies are impotent compared with that sin, which draws down the displeasure of God, and draws after it misery and death to the soul. According to the Scriptures, I am to pluck out even a right eye, or cut off even a right arm, which would ensnare or seduce me into crime. The loss of the most important limbs and organs is nothing compared to the loss of innocence. Such you know is the whole strain of Scripture. Sin, violated duty, the evil of the heart, this is the only evil of which Scripture takes account. It was from this that Christ came to redeem us. It is to purify us from this stain, to set us free from this yoke, that a new and supernatural agency was added to God's other means of promoting human happiness.

It is the design of these representations of Scripture to lead us to connect with sin or wrong-doing the ideas of evil, wretchedness, and debasement, more strongly than with any thing else ; and this deep, deliberate conviction of the wrong and evil done to ourselves by sin is not simply a command of Christianity. It is not an arbitrary, positive precept, which rests solely on the word of the lawgiver, and of which no account can be given, but that he wills it. It is alike the dictate of natural and revealed religion, an injunction of conscience and reason, founded in our very souls, and confirmed by constant experience. To regard sin, wrong-

doing, as the greatest of evils, is God's command, proclaimed from within and without, from Heaven and earth ; and he, who does not hear it, has not learnt the truth on which his whole happiness rests. This I propose to illustrate.

1. If we look within, we find in our very nature a testimony to the doctrine, that sin is the chief of evils, a testimony which, however slighted or smothered, will be recognised, I think, by every one who hears me. To understand this truth better, it may be useful to inquire into and compare the different kinds of evil. Evil has various forms, but these may all be reduced to two great divisions, called by philosophers *natural* and *moral*. By the first is meant the pain or suffering which springs from outward condition and events, or from causes independent of the will. The latter, that is, moral evil, belongs to character and conduct, and is commonly expressed by the words sin, vice, transgression of the rule of right. Now I say, that there is no man, unless he be singularly hardened and an exception to his race, who, if these two classes or divisions of evil should be clearly and fully presented him in moments of calm and deliberate thinking, would not feel, through the very constitution of his mind, that sin or vice is worse and more to be dreaded than pain. I am willing to take from among you, the individual, who has studied least the great questions of morality and religion, whose mind has grown up with least discipline. If I place before such a hearer two examples in strong contrast, one of a man gaining great property by an atrocious crime, and another exposing himself to great suffering through a resolute purpose of

duty, will he not tell me at once, from a deep moral sentiment, which leaves not a doubt on his mind, that the last has chosen the better part, that he is more to be envied than the first? On these great questions, What is the chief good? and What the chief evil? we are instructed by our own nature. An inward voice has told men, even in heathen countries, that excellence of character is the supreme good, and that baseness of soul and of action involves something worse than suffering. We have all of us, at some periods of life, had the same conviction; and these have been the periods when the mind has been healthiest, clearest, least perturbed by passion. Is there any one here, who does not feel, that what the divine faculty of conscience enjoins as right, has stronger claims upon him than what is recommended as merely agreeable or advantageous; that duty is something more sacred than interest or pleasure; that virtue is a good of a higher order than gratification; that crime is something worse than outward loss? What means the admiration with which we follow the conscientious and disinterested man, and which grows strong in proportion to his sacrifices to duty? Is it not the testimony of our whole souls to the truth and greatness of the good he has chosen? What means the feeling of abhorrence which we cannot repress, if we would, towards him, who, by abusing confidence, trampling on weakness, or hardening himself against the appeals of mercy, has grown rich or great? Do we think that such a man has made a good bargain in bartering principle for wealth? Is prosperous fortune a balance for vice?

In our deliberate moments, is there not a voice which pronounces his craft folly, and his success misery?

And, to come nearer home, what conviction is it, which springs up most spontaneously in our more reflecting moments, when we look back without passion on our own lives? Can vice *stand* that calm look? Is there a single wrong act, which we would not then rejoice to expunge from the unalterable records of our deeds? Do we ever congratulate ourselves on having despised the inward monitor, or revolted against God? To what portions of our history do we return most *joyfully*? Are they those in which we gained the world and lost the soul, in which temptation mastered our principles, which levity and sloth made a blank, or which a selfish and unprincipled activity made worse than a blank, in our existence? or are they those in which we suffered, but were true to conscience, in which we denied ourselves for duty, and sacrificed success through unwavering rectitude? In these moments of calm recollection, do not the very transgressions at which perhaps we once mocked, and which promised unmixed joy, recur to awaken shame and remorse? And do not shame and remorse involve a consciousness, that we have sunk beneath our proper good? that our highest nature, what constitutes our true self, has been sacrificed to low interests and pursuits? I make these appeals confidently. I think my questions can receive but one answer. Now these convictions and emotions, with which we witness moral evil in others, or recollect it in ourselves, these feelings towards guilt, which mere pain and suffering never excite, and which manifest

themselves with more or less distinctness in all nations and all stages of society, these inward attestations that sin, wrong-doing, is a peculiar evil, for which no outward good can give adequate compensation, surely these deserve to be regarded as the voice of nature, the voice of God. They are accompanied with a peculiar consciousness of truth. They are felt to be our ornament and defence. Thus our nature teaches the doctrine of Christianity, that sin or moral evil ought of all evils to inspire most abhorrence and fear.

Our first argument has been drawn from Sentiment, from deep and almost instinctive feeling, from the handwriting of the Creator on the soul. Our next may be drawn from Experience. We have said, that even when sin or wrong-doing is prosperous, and duty brings suffering, we feel that the suffering is a less evil than sin. I now add, in the second place, that sin, though it sometimes prospers, and never meets its full retribution on earth, yet, on the whole, produces more present suffering than all things else ; so that experience warns us against sin or wrong-doing as the chief evil we can incur. Whence come the sorest diseases and acutest bodily pains? Come they not from the lusts warring in our members, from criminal excess? What chiefly generates poverty and its worst sufferings? Is it not to evils of character, to the want of self-denying virtue, that we must ascribe chiefly the evils of our outward condition? The pages of history, how is it that they are so dark and sad? Is it not, that they are stained with crime? If we penetrate into private life, what spreads most mis-

ery through our homes? Is it ~~it~~ sickness, or selfishness? Is it want of outward comforts, or want of inward discipline, of the spirit of love? What more do we need to bring back Eden's happiness, than Eden's sinlessness? How light a burden would be life's necessary ills, were they not aided by the crushing weight of our own and others' faults and crimes? How fast would human woe vanish, were human selfishness, sensuality, injustice, pride, impiety, to yield to the pure and benign influences of Christian truth? How many of us know, that the sharpest pains we have ever suffered, have been the wounds of pride, the paroxysms of passion, the stings of remorse; and where this is not the case, who of us, if he were to know his own soul, would not see, that the daily restlessness of life, the wearing uneasiness of the mind, which, as a whole, brings more suffering than acute pains, is altogether the result of undisciplined passions, of neglect or disobedience of God? Our discontents and anxieties have their origin in moral evil. The lines of suffering on almost every human countenance, have been deepened, if not traced there, by unfaithfulness to conscience, by departures from duty. To do wrong is the surest way to bring suffering; no wrong deed ever failed to bring it. Those sins which are followed by no palpable pain, are yet terribly avenged, even in this life. They abridge our capacity of happiness, impair our relish for innocent pleasure, and increase our sensibility to suffering. They spoil us of the armour of a pure conscience, and of trust in God, without which we are naked, amidst hosts of foes, and are vulnerable by all the changes of life. Thus, to do wrong is to inflict the surest injury on our own peace.

No enemy can do us equal harm with what we do ourselves, whenever or however we violate any moral or religious obligation.

I have time but for one more view of moral evil or sin, showing that it is truly the greatest evil. It is this. The miseries of disobedience to conscience and God are not exhausted in this life. Sin deserves, calls for, and will bring down Future, greater misery. This Christianity teaches, and this nature teaches. Retribution is not a new doctrine, brought by Christ into the world. Though darkened and corrupted, it was spread every where before he came. It carried alarm to rude nations, which nothing on earth could terrify. It mixed with all the false religions of antiquity, and it finds a response now in every mind, not perverted by sophistry. That we shall carry with us into the future world our present minds, and that a character, formed in opposition to our highest faculties and to the will of God, will produce suffering in our future being, these are truths, in which revelation, reason, and conscience remarkably conspire.

I know, indeed, that this doctrine is sometimes questioned. It is maintained by some among us, that punishment is confined to the present state; that in changing worlds we shall change our characters; that moral evil is to be buried with the body in the grave. As this opinion is spread industriously, and as it tends to diminish the dread of sin, it deserves some notice. To my mind, a more irrational doctrine was never broached. — In the first place, it contradicts all our experience of the nature and laws of the mind. There

is nothing more striking in the mind, than the connexion of its successive states. Our present knowledge, thoughts, feelings, characters, are the results of former impressions, passions, and pursuits. We are this moment what the past has made us ; and to suppose, that, at death, the influences of our whole past course are to cease on our minds, and that a character is to spring up altogether at war with what has preceded it, is to suppose the most important law or principle of the mind to be violated, is to destroy all analogy between the present and future, and to substitute for experience the wildest dreams of fancy. In truth, such a sudden revolution in the character, as is here supposed, seems to destroy a man's identity. The individual thus transformed, can hardly seem to himself or to others the same being. It is equivalent to the creation of a new soul.

Let me next ask, what fact can be adduced in proof or illustration of the power ascribed to death, of changing and purifying the mind. What is death? It is the dissolution of certain limbs and organs by which the soul now acts. But these, however closely connected with the mind, are entirely distinct from its powers, from thought and will, from conscience and affection. Why should the last grow pure from the dissolution of the first? Why shall the mind put on a new character, by laying aside the gross instruments through which it now operates? At death, the hands, the feet, the eye, and the ear perish. But they often perish during life ; and does character change with them? It is true that our animal appetites are weakened and sometimes destroyed by the decay of

the bodily organs on which they depend. But our deeper principles of action, and the moral complexion of the mind, are not therefore reversed. It often happens, that the sensualist, broken down by disease, which excess has induced, comes to loathe the luxuries to which he was once enslaved; but do his selfishness, his low habits of thought, his insensibility to God, decline and perish with his animal desires? **Lop off the criminal's hands; does the disposition to do mischief vanish with them? When the feet mortify, do we see a corresponding mortification of the will to go astray? The loss of sight or hearing is a partial death; but is a single vice plucked from the mind, or one of its strong passions palsied, by this destruction of its chief corporeal instruments?**

Again; the idea that by dying, or changing worlds, a man may be made better or virtuous, shows an ignorance of the nature of moral goodness or virtue. This belongs to free beings; it supposes moral liberty. A man cannot be made virtuous, as an instrument may be put in tune, by a foreign hand, by an outward force. Virtue is that to which the man himself contributes. It is the fruit of exertion. It supposes conquest of temptation. It cannot be given from abroad to one who has wasted life, or steeped himself in crime. To suppose moral goodness breathed from abroad into the guilty mind, just as health may be imparted to a sick body, is to overlook the distinction between corporeal and intellectual natures, and to degrade a free being into a machine.

I will only add, that to suppose no connexion to exist between the present and the future character, is

to take away the use of the present state. Why are we placed in a state of discipline, exposed to temptation, encompassed with suffering, if, without discipline, and by a sovereign act of Omnipotence, we are all of us, be our present characters what they may, soon and suddenly to be made perfect in virtue, and perfect in happiness?

Let us not listen for a moment to a doctrine so irrational, as that our present characters do not follow us into a future world. If we are to live again, let us settle it as a sure fact, that we shall carry with us our present minds, such as we now make them; that we shall reap good or ill according to their improvement or corruption; and, of consequence, that every act, which affects character, will reach in its influence beyond the grave, and have a bearing on our future weal or woe. We are now framing our future lot. He who does a bad deed says, more strongly than words can utter, "I cast away a portion of future good, I resolve on future pain."

I proceed now to an important and solemn remark, in illustration of the evil of sin. It is plainly implied in Scripture, that we shall suffer much more from sin, evil tempers, irreligion, in the future world, than we suffer here. This is one main distinction between the two states. In the present world, sin does indeed bring with it many pains, but not full or exact retribution, and sometimes it seems crowned with prosperity; and the cause of this is obvious. The present world is a state for the formation of character. It is meant to be a state of trial, where we are to act freely, to have opportunities of wrong as well as right action,

and to become virtuous amidst temptation. Now such a purpose requires, that sin, or wrong-doing, should not regularly and infallibly produce its full and immediate punishment. For suppose, my hearers, that at the very instant of a bad purpose or a bad deed, a sore and awful penalty were unfailingly to light upon you; would this be consistent with trial? would you have moral freedom? would you not live under compulsion? Who would do wrong, if judgment were to come like lightning after every evil deed? In such a world, fear would suspend our liberty and supersede conscience. Accordingly sin, though, as we have seen, it produces great misery, is still left to compass many of its objects, often to prosper, often to be gain. Vice, bad as it is, has often many pleasures in its train. The worst men partake, equally with the good, the light of the sun, the rain, the harvest, the accommodations and improvements of civilized life, and sometimes accumulate more largely outward goods. And thus sin has its pleasures, and escapes many of its natural and proper fruits. We live in a world where, if we please, we may forget ourselves, may delude ourselves, may intoxicate our minds with false hopes, and may find for a time a deceitful joy in an evil course. In this respect the future will differ from the present world. After death, character will produce its full effect. According to the Scriptures, the color of our future existence will be wholly determined by the habits and principles which we carry into it. The circumstances which in this life prevent vice, sin, wrong-doing, from inflicting pain, will not operate hereafter. There the


evil mind will be exposed to its own terrible agency, and nothing, nothing will interfere between the transgressor and his own awakened conscience. I ask you to pause and weigh this distinction between the present and future. In the present life, we have, as I have said, the means of escaping, amusing, and forgetting ourselves. Once, in the course of every daily revolution of the sun, we all of us find refuge, and many a long refuge, in sleep; and he who has lived without God, and in violation of his duty, hears not, for hours, a whisper of the monitor within. But sleep is a function of our present animal frame, and let not the transgressor anticipate this boon in the world of retribution before him. It may be, and he has reason to fear, that in that state repose will not weigh down his eyelids, that conscience will not slumber there, that night and day the same reproaching voice is to cry within, that unrepented sin will fasten with unrelaxing grasp on the ever-waking soul. What an immense change in condition would the removal of this single alleviation of suffering produce.

Again; in the present state how many pleasant sights, scenes, voices, motions, draw us from ourselves; and he who has done wrong, how easily may he forget it, perhaps mock at it, under the bright light of this sun, on this fair earth, at the table of luxury, and amidst cheerful associates. In the state of retribution, he who has abused the present state, will find no such means of escaping the wages of sin. The precise mode in which such a man is to exist hereafter, I know not. But I know, that it will offer nothing to

amuse him, to dissipate thought, to turn him away from himself; nothing to which he can fly for refuge from the inward penalties of transgression.

In the present life, I have said, the outward creation, by its interesting objects, draws the evil man from himself. It seems to me probable, that, in the future, the whole creation will, through sin, be turned into a source of suffering, and will perpetually throw back the evil mind on its own transgressions. I can briefly state the reflections which lead to this anticipation. The Scriptures strongly imply, if not positively teach, that in the future life we shall exist in connexion with some material frame; and the doctrine is sustained by reason; for it can hardly be thought, that in a creation which is marked by gradual change and progress, we should make at once the mighty transition from our present state into a purely spiritual or unembodied existence. Now in the present state we find, that the mind has an immense power over the body, and, when diseased, often communicates disease to its sympathizing companion. I believe, that, in the future state, the mind will have this power of conforming its outward frame to itself, incomparably more than here. We must never forget, that, in that world, mind or character is to exert an all-powerful sway; and accordingly, it is rational to believe, that the corrupt and deformed mind, which wants moral goodness or a spirit of concord with God and with the universe, will create for itself, as its fit dwelling, a deformed body, which will also want concord or harmony with all things around it. Suppose this to exist, and the whole creation which

now amuses, may become an instrument of suffering, fixing the soul with a more harrowing consciousness on itself. You know that even now, in consequence of certain derangements of the nervous system, the beautiful light gives acute pain, and sounds, which once delighted us, become shrill and distressing. How often this excessive irritableness of the body has its origin in moral disorders, perhaps few of us suspect. I apprehend, indeed, that we should be all amazed, were we to learn to what extent the body is continually incapacitated for enjoyment, and made susceptible of suffering, by sins of the heart and life. That delicate part of our organization, on which sensibility, pain, and pleasure depend, is, I believe, peculiarly alive to the touch of moral evil. How easily, then, may the mind hereafter frame the future body according to itself, so that, in proportion to its vice, it will receive, through its organs and senses, impressions of gloom, which it will feel to be the natural productions of its own depravity, and which will in this way give a terrible energy to conscience! For myself, I see no need of a local hell for the sinner after death. When I reflect, how, in the present world, a guilty mind has power to deform the countenance, to undermine health, to poison pleasure, to darken the fairest scenes of nature, to turn prosperity into a curse, I can easily understand how, in the world to come, sin, working without obstruction according to its own nature, should spread the gloom of a dungeon over the whole creation, and, wherever it goes, should turn the universe into a hell.



In these remarks I presume not to be the prophet of the future world. I only wish you to *feel* how terribly sin is hereafter to work its own misery, and how false and dangerous it is to argue from your present power of escaping its consequences, that you may escape them in the life to come. Let each of us be assured, that by abusing this world, we shall not earn a better. The Scriptures announce a state of more exact and rigorous retribution than the present. Let this truth sink into our hearts. It shows us, what I have aimed to establish, that to do wrong is to incur the greatest of calamities, that sin is the chief of evils. May I not say, that nothing else deserves the name? No other evil will follow us beyond the grave. Poverty, disease, the world's scorn, the pain of bereaved affection, these cease at the grave. The purified spirit lays down there every burden. One and only one evil can be carried from this world to the next, and that is, the evil within us, moral evil, guilt, crime, ungoverned passion, the depraved mind, the memory of a wasted or ill-spent life, the character which has grown up under neglect of God's voice in the soul and in his word. This, this will go with us, to stamp itself on our future frames, to darken our future being, to separate us like an impassable gulf from our Creator and from pure and happy beings, to be as a consuming fire and an undying worm.

I have spoken of the pains and penalties of moral evil, or of wrong-doing, in the world to come. How long they will endure, I know not. Whether they will issue in the reformation and happiness of the suf

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I have spoken of the pains and penalties of moral evil, or of wrong-doing, in the world to come. How long they will endure, I know not. Whether they will issue in the reformation and happiness of the sinner

ferer, or will terminate in the extinction of his conscious being, is a question on which Scripture throws no clear light. Plausible arguments may be adduced in support of both these doctrines. On this and on other points revelation aims not to give precise information, but to fix in us a deep impression, that great suffering awaits a disobedient, wasted, immoral, irreligious life. To fasten this impression, to make it a deliberate and practical conviction, is more needful than to ascertain the mode or duration of future suffering. May the views this day given, lead us all to self-communion, and to new energy, watchfulness, and prayer against our sins. May they teach us, that to do wrong, to neglect or violate any known duty, is of all evils the most fearful. Let every act, or feeling, or motive, which bears the brand of guilt, seem to us more terrible than the worst calamities of life. Let us dread it more than the agonies of the most painful death.

DISCOURSE IX.

2 TIMOTHY i. 10.

OUR SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, WHO HATH ABOLISHED DEATH, AND HATH BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL.

IMMORTALITY is the glorious discovery of Christianity. I say discovery, not because a future life was wholly unknown before Christ, but because it was so revealed by him as to become, to a considerable extent, a new doctrine. Before Christ immortality was a conjecture, or a vague hope. Jesus, by his teaching and resurrection, has made it a certainty. Again, before Christ, a future life lent little aid to virtue. It was seized upon by the imagination and passions, and so perverted by them as often to minister to vice. In Christianity this doctrine is wholly turned to a moral use; and the Future is revealed only to give motives, resolution, force, to self-conflict and to a holy life.

My aim in this discourse is, to strengthen, if I may, your conviction of immortality; and I have thought that I may do this by showing, that this great truth is also a dictate of nature; that reason, though unable to establish it, yet accords with and adopts it; that it is written alike in God's word and in the soul. It is plainly

rational to expect, that, if man was made for immortality, the marks of this destination will be found in his very constitution, and that these marks will grow stronger in proportion to the unfolding of his faculties. I would show that this expectation proves just, that the teaching of revelation, in regard to a future life, finds a strong response in our own nature.

This topic is the more important, because to some men there seem to be appearances in nature unfavorable to immortality. To many, the constant operation of decay in all the works of creation, the dissolution of all the forms of animal and vegetable nature, gives a feeling, as if destruction were the law to which we and all beings are subjected.

It has often been said by the skeptic that the *racæ* or classes of being are alone perpetual, that all the *individuals* which compose them are doomed to perish. Now I affirm, that the more we know of the Mind, the more we see reason to distinguish it from the animal and vegetable races, which grow and decay around us; and that in its very nature we see reason for exempting it from the universal law of destruction. To this point, I now ask your attention.

When we look round us on the earth, we do indeed see every thing changing, decaying, passing away; and so inclined are we to reason from analogy or resemblance, that it is not wonderful that the dissolution of all the organized forms of matter should seem to us to announce our own destruction. But we overlook the distinctions between matter and mind; and these are so immense as to justify the directly opposite conclusion. Let me point out some of these distinctions.


1. When we look at the organized productions of nature, we see that they require only a limited time, and most of them a very short time, to reach their perfection, and accomplish their end. Take, for example that noble production, a tree. Having reached a certain height and borne leaves, flowers, and fruit, it has nothing more to do. Its powers are fully developed ; it has no hidden capacities, of which its buds and fruit are only the beginnings and pledges. Its design is fulfilled ; the principle of life within it can effect no more. Not so the mind. We can never say of this, as of the full grown tree in autumn, It has answered its end, it has done its work, its capacity is exhausted. On the contrary, the nature, powers, desires, and purposes of the mind are all undefined. We never feel, when a great intellect has risen to an original thought, or a vast discovery, that it has now accomplished its whole purpose, reached its bound, and can yield no other or higher fruits. On the contrary our conviction of its resources is enlarged ; we discern more its affinity to the inexhaustible intelligence of its Author. In every step of its progress we see a new impulse gained and the pledge of nobler acquirements. So when a pure and resolute mind has made some great sacrifice to truth and duty, has manifested its attachment to God and man in singular trials, we do not feel, as if the whole energy of virtuous principle were now put forth ; as if the measure of excellence were filled ; as if the maturest fruits were now borne, and henceforth the soul could only repeat itself. We feel, on the contrary, that virtue by illustrious efforts replenishes instead of wasting its life ; that the mind

by perseverance in well-doing, instead of sinking into a mechanical tameness, is able to conceive of higher duties, is armed for a nobler daring, and grows more efficient in charity. The mind, by going forward, does not reach insurmountable prison-walls, but learns more and more the boundlessness of its powers, and of the range for which it was created.

Let me place this topic in another light, which may show, even more strongly, the contrast of the mind with the noblest productions of matter. My meaning may best be conveyed by reverting to the tree. We consider the tree as having answered its highest purpose, when it yields a particular fruit. We judge of its perfection by a fixed, positive, definite product. The mind, however, in proportion to its improvement, becomes conscious that its perfection consists not in fixed, prescribed effects, not in exact and defined attainments, but in an original, creative, unconfined energy, which yields new products, which carries it into new fields of thought and new efforts for religion and humanity. This truth indeed is so obvious, that even the least improved may discern it. You all feel, that the most perfect mind is not that which works in a prescribed way, which thinks and acts according to prescribed rules, but that which has a spring of action in itself, which combines anew the knowledge received from other minds, which explores its hidden and multiplied relations, and gives it forth in fresh and higher forms. The perfection of the tree, then, lies in a precise or definite product. That of the mind lies in an indefinite and boundless energy. The first implies limits. To set limits to

the mind would destroy that original power in which its perfection consists. Here then we observe a distinction between material forms and the mind; and from the destruction of the first, which, as we see, attain perfection and fulfill their purpose in a limited duration, we cannot argue to the destruction of the last, which plainly possesses the capacity of a progress without end.

2. We have pointed out one contrast between the mind and material forms. The latter, we have seen, by their nature have bounds. The tree in a short time, and by rising and spreading a short distance, accomplishes its end. I now add, that the system of nature to which the tree belongs, requires that it should stop where it does. Were it to grow for ever, it would be an infinite mischief. A single plant, endowed with the principle of unlimited expansion, would in the progress of centuries overshadow nations and exclude every other growth, would exhaust the earth's whole fertility. Material forms then must have narrow bounds, and their usefulness requires that their life and growth should often be arrested even before reaching the limits prescribed by nature. But the indefinite expansion of the mind, instead of warring with and counteracting the system of creation, harmonizes with and perfects it. One tree, should it grow for ever, would exclude other forms of vegetable life. One mind, in proportion to its expansion, awakens and in a sense creates other minds. It multiplies, instead of exhausting, the nutriment which other understandings need. A mind, the more it has of intel-



lectual and moral life, the more it spreads life and power around it. It is an ever-enlarging source of thought and love. Let me here add, that the mind, by unlimited growth, not only yields a greater amount of good to other beings, but it produces continually new forms of good. This is an important distinction. Were the tree to spread indefinitely, it would abound more in fruit, but in fruit of the same kind; and, by excluding every other growth, it would destroy the variety of products, which now contribute to health and enjoyment. But the mind, in its progress, is perpetually yielding new fruits, new forms of thought and virtue and sanctity. It always contains within itself the germs of higher influences than it has ever put forth, the buds of fruits which it has never borne. Thus the very reason which requires the limitation of material forms, I mean, the good of the whole system, seems to require the unlimited growth of mind.

3. Another distinction between material forms and the mind is, that to the former destruction is no loss. They exist for others wholly, in no degree for themselves; and others only can sorrow for their fall. The mind on the contrary has a deep interest in its own existence. In this respect, indeed, it is distinguished from the animal as well as the vegetable. To the animal, the past is a blank, and so is the future. The present is every thing. But to the mind the present is comparatively nothing. Its great sources of happiness are memory and hope. It has power over the past, not only the power of recalling it, but of turning *to good all its experience, its errors and sufferings as*

well as its successes. It has power over the future, not only the power of anticipating it, but of bringing the present to bear upon it, and of sowing for it the seeds of a golden harvest. To a mind capable of thus connecting itself with all duration, of spreading itself through times past and to come, existence becomes infinitely dear, and, what is most worthy of observation, its interest in its own being increases with its progress in power and virtue. An improved mind understands the greatness of its own nature, and the worth of existence, as these cannot be understood by the unimproved. The thought of its own destruction suggests to it an extent of ruin, which the latter cannot comprehend. The thought of such faculties as reason, conscience, and moral will, being extinguished, — of powers, akin to the divine energy, being annihilated by their author, — of truth and virtue, those images of God, being blotted out, — of progress towards perfection being broken off almost at its beginning, — this is a thought fitted to overwhelm a mind, in which the consciousness of its own spiritual nature is in a good degree unfolded. In other words, the more the mind is true to itself and to God, the more it clings to existence, the more it shrinks from extinction as an infinite loss. Would not its destruction, then, be a very different thing from the destruction of material beings, and does the latter furnish an analogy or presumption in support of the former? To me, the undoubted fact, that the mind thirsts for continued being, just in proportion as it obeys the will of its Maker, is a proof, next to irresistible, of its *being destined by him for immortality.*

4. Let me add one more distinction between the mind and material forms. I return to the tree. We speak of the tree as *destroyed*. We say that destruction is the order of nature, and some say that man must not hope to escape the universal law. Now we deceive ourselves in this use of words. There is in reality no destruction in the material world. True the tree is resolved into its elements. But its elements survive, and, still more, they survive to fulfill the same end which they before accomplished. Not a power of nature is lost. The particles of the decayed tree are only left at liberty to form new, perhaps more beautiful and useful combinations. They may shoot up into more luxuriant foliage, or enter into the structure of the highest animals. But were mind to perish, there would be absolute, irretrievable destruction ; for mind, from its nature, is something individual, an uncompounded essence, which cannot be broken into parts, and enter into union with other minds. I am myself, and can become no other being. My experience, my history, cannot become my neighbour's. My consciousness, my memory, my interest in my past life, my affections, cannot be transferred. If in any instance I have withstood temptation, and through such resistance have acquired power over myself and a claim to the approbation of my fellow beings, this resistance, this power, this claim are my own ; I cannot make them another's. I can give away my property, my limbs ; but that which makes myself, in other words, my consciousness, my recollections, my feelings, my hopes, these can never become parts of another mind. In the extinction of a thinking, moral

being, who has gained truth and virtue, there would be an absolute destruction. This event would not be as the setting of the sun, which is a transfer of light to new regions ; but a quenching of the light. It would be a ruin such as nature nowhere exhibits, a ruin of what is infinitely more precious than the outward universe, and is not, therefore, to be inferred from any of the changes of the material world.

I am aware, that views of this nature, intended to show us that immortality is impressed on the soul itself, fail to produce conviction from various causes. There are not a few, who are so accustomed to look on the errors and crimes of society, that human nature seems to them little raised above the brutal ; and they hear, with a secret incredulity, of those distinctions and capacities of the mind which point to its perpetual existence. To such men, I might say, that it is a vicious propensity which leads them to fasten continually and exclusively on the sins of human nature ; just as it is criminal to fix the thoughts perpetually on the miseries of human life, and to see nothing but evil in the order of creation and the providence of God. But, passing over this, I allow that human nature abounds in crime. But this does not destroy my conviction of its greatness and immortality. I say that I see in crime itself the proofs of human greatness and of an immortal nature. The position may seem extravagant, but it may be fully sustained.

I ask you first to consider, what is implied in crime. Consider in what it originates. It has its origin in the noblest principle that can belong

to any being; I mean, in moral freedom. There can be no crime without liberty of action, without moral power. Were man a machine, were he a mere creature of sensation and impulse, like the brute, he could do no wrong. It is only because he has the faculties of reason and conscience, and a power over himself, that he is capable of contracting guilt. Thus great guilt is itself a testimony to the high endowments of the soul.

In the next place, let me ask you to consider, whence it is that man sins. He sins by being exposed to temptation. Now the great design of temptation plainly is, that the soul, by withstanding it, should gain strength, should make progress, should become a proper object of divine reward. That is, man sins through an exposure which is designed to carry him forward to perfection, so that the cause of his guilt points to a continued and improved existence.

In the next place, I say, that guilt has a peculiar consciousness belonging to it, which speaks strongly of a future life. It carries with it intimations of retribution. Its natural associate is fear. The connexion of misery with crime is anticipated by a kind of moral instinct; and the very circumstance, that the unprincipled man sometimes escapes present suffering, suggests more strongly a future state, where this apparent injustice will be redressed, and where present prosperity will become an aggravation of woe. Guilt sometimes speaks of a future state even in louder and more solemn tones than virtue. It has been known to overwhelm the spirit with terrible forebodings, and has found through its presentiments the hell which it feared.

Thus guilt does not destroy, but corroborates, the proofs contained in the soul itself of its own future being.

Let me add one more thought. The sins, which abound in the world, and which are so often adduced to chill our belief in the capacities and vast prospects of human nature, serve to place in stronger relief, and in brighter light, the examples of piety and virtue, which, all must acknowledge, are to be found among the guilty multitude. A mind which, in such a world, amidst so many corrupting influences, holds fast to truth, duty, and God, is a nobler mind, than any which could be formed in the absence of such temptation. Thus the great sinfulness of the world makes the virtue which exists in it more glorious; and the very struggles which the good man has to maintain with its allurements and persecutions, prepare him for a brighter reward. To me such views are singularly interesting and encouraging. I delight to behold the testimony which sin itself furnishes to man's greatness and immortality. I indeed see great guilt on earth; but I see it giving occasion to great moral strength, and to singular devotion and virtue in the good, and thus throwing on human nature a lustre which more than compensates for its own deformity. I do not shut my eyes on the guilt of my race. I see, in history, human malignity, so aggravated, so unrelenting, as even to pursue with torture, and to doom to the most agonizing death, the best of human beings. But when I see these beings unmoved by torture; meek, and calm, and forgiving in their agonies; superior to death, and never so glorious as in the last hour, — I forget the guilt which persecutes them, in my admiration of their virtue. In

their sublime constancy, I see a testimony to the worth and immortality of human nature, that outweighs the wickedness of which they seem to be the victims; and I feel an assurance, which nothing can wrest from me, that the godlike virtue, which has thus been driven from earth, will find a home, an everlasting home, in its native heaven. Thus sin itself becomes a witness to the future life of man.

I have thus, my hearers, endeavoured to show, that our nature, the more it is inquired into, discovers more clearly the impress of immortality. I do not mean, that this evidence supersedes all other. From its very nature it can only be understood thoroughly by improved and purified minds. The proof of immortality, which is suited to all understandings, is found in the Gospel, sealed by the blood and confirmed by the resurrection of Christ. But this, I think, is made more impressive, by a demonstration of its harmony with the teachings of nature. To me, nature and revelation speak with one voice on the great theme of man's future being. Let not their joint witness be unheard.

How full, how bright are the evidences of this grand truth. How weak are the common arguments, which skepticism arrays against it. To me, there is but one objection against immortality, if objection it may be called, and this arises from the very greatness of the truth. My mind sometimes sinks under its weight, is lost in its immensity; I scarcely dare believe that such a good is placed within my reach. When I think of myself, as existing through all future ages, as surviving this earth and that sky, as exempted from every imperfection and error of my present being, as

clothed with an angel's glory, as comprehending with my intellect and embracing in my affections an extent of creation compared with which the earth is a point ; when I think of myself, as looking on the outward universe with an organ of vision that will reveal to me a beauty and harmony and order not now imagined, and as having an access to the minds of the wise and good, which will make them in a sense my own ; when I think of myself, as forming friendships with innumerable beings of rich and various intellect and of the noblest virtue, as introduced to the society of heaven, as meeting there the great and excellent of whom I have read in history, as joined with " the just made perfect " in an ever-enlarging ministry of benevolence, as conversing with Jesus Christ with the familiarity of friendship, and especially as having an immediate intercourse with God, such as the closest intimacies of earth dimly shadow forth ; — when this thought of my future being comes to me, whilst I hope, I also fear ; the blessedness seems too great ; the consciousness of present weakness and unworthiness is almost too strong for hope. But when, in this frame of mind, I look round on the creation, and see there the marks of an omnipotent goodness, to which nothing is impossible, and from which every thing may be hoped ; when I see around me the proofs of an Infinite Father, who must desire the perpetual progress of his intellectual offspring ; when I look next at the human mind, and see what powers a few years have unfolded, and discern in it the capacity of everlasting improvement ; and especially when I look at Jesus, the conqueror of death, the heir of immortality, who

has gone as the forerunner of mankind into the mansions of light and purity, I can and do admit the almost overpowering thought of the everlasting life, growth, felicity of the human soul.

To each of us, my friends, is this felicity offered ; a good which turns to darkness and worthlessness the splendor and excellence of the most favored lot on earth. I say, it is *offered*. It cannot be forced on us ; from its nature, it must be won. Immortal happiness is nothing more than the unfolding of our own minds, the full, bright exercise of our best powers ; and these powers are never to be unfolded here or hereafter, but through our own free exertion. To anticipate a higher existence whilst we neglect our own souls, is a delusion on which reason frowns no less than revelation. Dream not of a heaven into which you may enter, live here as you may. To such as waste the present state, the future will not, cannot, bring happiness. There is no concord between them and that world of purity. A human being, who has lived without God and without self-improvement, can no more enjoy Heaven, than a mouldering body, lifted from the tomb and placed amidst beautiful prospects, can enjoy the light through its decayed eyes, or feel the balmy air which blows away its dust. My hearers, immortality is a glorious doctrine ; but not given us for speculation or amusement. Its happiness is to be realized only through our own struggles with ourselves, only through our own reaching forward to new virtue and piety. To be joined with Christ in Heaven, we must be joined with him now in spirit, in the conquest of temptation, in charity and

well-doing. Immortality should begin here. The seed is now to be sown, which is to expand for ever. "Be not weary then in well-doing; for in due time we shall reap, if we faint not."

DISCOURSE X.

EPHESIANS vi. 24.

GRACE BE WITH ALL THEM THAT LOVE OUR LORD JESUS
CHRIST IN SINCERITY.

I propose, in this discourse, to speak of Love to Christ, and especially of the foundations on which it rests. I will not detain you by remarks on the importance of the subject. I trust, that you feel it, and that no urgency is needed to secure your serious attention.

Love to Christ is said, and said with propriety, to be a duty, not of Natural, but of Revealed religion. Other precepts of Christianity are dictates of nature as well as of revelation. They result from the original and permanent relations which we bear to our Creator and our fellow creatures ; and are written by God on the mind, as well as in the Bible. For example, gratitude towards the Author of our being, and justice and benevolence towards men, are inculcated with more or less distinctness by our moral faculties ; they are parts of the inward law which belongs to a rational mind ; and accordingly, wherever men are found, you find some conviction of these duties, some sense of their obligation to a higher power and to one another. But the same is not true of the

duty of love to Jesus Christ ; for, as the knowledge of him is not communicated by nature, as his name is not written, like that of God, on the heavens and earth, but is confined to countries where his Gospel is preached, it is plain that no sense of obligation to him can be felt beyond these bounds. No regard is due or can be paid to him beyond these. It is commonly said, therefore, that love to Christ is a duty of revealed, not natural religion, and this language is correct ; but let it not mislead us. Let us not imagine, that attachment to Jesus is an arbitrary duty, that it is unlike our other duties, that it is separate from common virtue, or that it is not founded, like all virtues, in our constitution, or not recognised and enforced by natural conscience. We say, that nature does not enjoin this regard to the Saviour, simply because it does not make him known ; but, as soon as he is made known, nature enjoins love and veneration towards him as truly as towards God or towards excellent men. Reason and conscience teach us to regard him with a strong and tender interest. Love to him is not an arbitrary precept. It is not unlike our other affections ; it requires for its culture no peculiar influences from heaven ; it stands on the same ground with all our duties ; it is to be strengthened by the same means. It is essentially the same sentiment, feeling, or principle, which we put forth towards other excellent beings, whether in heaven or on earth.

I make these remarks, because I apprehend that the duty of loving Jesus Christ has been so urged, as to seem to many particularly mysterious and obscure ; and the consequence has been, that by some it has

been neglected as unnatural, unreasonable, and unconnected with common life ; whilst others, in seeking to cherish it, have rushed into wild, extravagant, and feverish emotions. I would rescue, if I can, this duty from neglect on the one hand, and from abuse on the other ; and to do this, nothing is necessary, but to show the true ground and nature of love to Christ. You will then see, not only that it is an exalted and generous sentiment, but that it blends with, and gives support to, all the virtuous principles of the mind, and to all the duties, even the most common, of active life.

There is another great good, which may result from a just explanation of the love due to Christ. You will see, that this sentiment has no dependence, at least no necessary dependence, on the opinions we may form about his place, or rank, in the universe. This topic has convulsed the church for ages. Christians have cast away the spirit, in settling the precise dignity, of their Master. That this question is unimportant, I do not say. That some views are more favorable to love towards him than others, I believe ; but I maintain that all opinions, adopted by different sects, include the foundation, on which veneration and attachment are due to our common Lord. This truth, for I hold it to be a plain truth, is so fitted to heal the wounds and allay the uncharitable servors of Christ's divided church, that I shall rejoice, if I can set it forth to others as clearly as it rises to my own mind.

To accomplish the ends now expressed, I am led to propose to you one great but simple question.


What is it that constitutes Christ's claim to love and respect? What is it that is to be loved in Christ? Why are we to hold him dear? I answer, There is but one ground for virtuous affection in the universe, but one object worthy of cherished and enduring love in heaven or on earth, and that is, **Moral Goodness**. I make no exceptions. My principle applies to **all** beings, to the Creator as well as to his creatures. The claim of God to the love of his rational offspring rests on the rectitude and benevolence of **his will**. It is the moral beauty and grandeur of his character, to which alone we are bound to pay homage. The **only** power which can and ought to be loved, is a **beneficent and righteous power**. The creation is glorious, and binds us to supreme and everlasting love to God, only because it sprung from and shows forth this energy of goodness; nor has any being a claim on love, any farther than this same energy dwells in him, and is manifested in him. I know no exception to this principle. I can conceive of no being, who can have any claim to affection, but what rests on his character, meaning by this the spirit and principles which constitute his mind, and from which he acts; nor do I know but one character which entitles a being to our hearts, and it is that, which the Scriptures express by the word Righteousness; which in man is often called Virtue, in God, Holiness; which consists essentially in supreme reverence for and adoption of what is right; and of which benevolence, or universal charity, is the brightest manifestation.

After these remarks, you will easily understand what I esteem the ground of love to Christ. It is his

spotless purity, his moral perfection, his unrivalled goodness. It is the spirit of his religion, which is the spirit of God, dwelling in him without measure. Of consequence, to love Christ is to love the perfection of virtue, of righteousness, of benevolence ; and the great excellence of this love is, that, by cherishing it, we imbibe, we strengthen in our own souls the most illustrious virtue, and through Jesus become like to God.

From the view now given, you see that love to Jesus Christ is a perfectly natural sentiment ; I mean, one which our natural sense of right enjoins and approves, and which our minds are constituted to feel and to cherish, as truly as any affection to the good whom we know on earth. It is not a theological, mysterious feeling, which some supernatural and inexplicable agency must generate within us. It has its foundation or root in the very frame of our minds, in that sense of right by which we are enabled to discern, and bound to love, perfection. I observe next, that, according to this view, it is, as I have said, an exalted and generous affection ; for it brings us into communion and contact with the sublimest character ever revealed among men. It includes and nourishes great thoughts and high aspirations, and gives us here on earth the benefit of intercourse with celestial beings.

Do you not also see that the love of Christ, according to the view now given of it, has no dependence on any particular views which are formed of his nature by different sects ? According to all sects, is he not perfect, spotless in virtue, the representative and resplendent image of the moral goodness and rectitude



of God? However contending sects may be divided as to other points, they all agree in the moral perfection of his character. All recognise his most glorious peculiarity, his sublime and unsullied goodness. All therefore see in him that which alone deserves love and veneration.

I am aware, that other views are not uncommon. It is said, that a true love to Christ requires just opinions concerning him, and that they who form different opinions of him, however they may use the same name, do not love the same being. We must *know* him, it is said, in order to esteem him as we ought. Be it so. To love Christ, we must know him. But what must we know respecting him? Must we know his countenance and form, must we know the manner in which he existed before his birth, or the manner in which he now exists? Must we know his precise rank in the universe, his precise power and influence? On all these points, indeed, just views would be gratifying and auxiliary to virtue. But love to Christ may exist, and grow strong, without them. What we need to this end, is the knowledge of his mind, his virtues, his principles of action. No matter how profoundly we speculate about Christ, or how profusely we heap upon him epithets of praise and admiration; if we do not understand the distinguishing virtues of his character, and see and feel their grandeur, we are as ignorant of him as if we had never heard his name, nor can we offer him an acceptable love. I desire indeed to know Christ's rank in the universe; but rank is nothing, except as it proves and manifests superior virtue. High station only de-

grades a being who fills it unworthily. It is the mind which gives dignity to the office, not the office to the mind. All glory is of the soul. Accordingly we know little or nothing of another until we look into his soul. I cannot be said to know a being of a singularly great character, because I have learned from what region he came, to what family he belongs, or what rank he sustains. I can only know him as far as I discern the greatness of his spirit, the unconquerable strength of his benevolence, his loyalty to God and duty, his power to act and suffer in a good and righteous cause, and his intimate communion with God. Who knows Christ best? I answer, It is he who, in reading his history, sees and feels most distinctly and deeply the perfection by which he was distinguished. Who knows Jesus best? It is he, who, not resting in general and almost unmeaning praises, becomes acquainted with what was peculiar, characteristic, and individual in his mind, and who has thus framed to himself, not a dim image called Jesus, but a living being, with distinct and glorious features, and with all the reality of a well-known friend. Who best knows Jesus? I answer, It is he, who deliberately feels and knows, that his character is of a higher order than all other characters which have appeared on earth, and who thirsts to commune with and resemble it. I hope I am plain. When I hear, as I do, men disputing about Jesus, and imagining that they know him by settling some theory as to his generation in time or eternity, or as to his rank in the scale of being, I feel that their knowledge of him is about as great as I should have of some saint or hero, by study-

ing his genealogy. These controversies have built up a technical theology, but give no insight into the mind and heart of Jesus ; and without this the true knowledge of him cannot be enjoyed. And here I would observe, not in the spirit of reproach, but from a desire to do good, that I know not a more effectual method of hiding Jesus from us, of keeping us strangers to him, than the inculcation of the doctrine which makes him the same being with his Father, makes him God himself. This doctrine throws over him a mistiness. For myself, when I attempt to bring it home, I have not a real being before me, not a soul which I can understand and sympathize with, but a vague, shifting image, which gives nothing of the stability of knowledge. A being, consisting of two natures, two souls, one Divine and another human, one finite and another infinite, is made up of qualities which destroy one another, and leave nothing for distinct apprehension. This compound of different minds, and of contradictory attributes, I cannot, if I would, regard as one conscious person, one intelligent agent. It strikes me almost irresistibly as a fiction. On the other hand, Jesus, contemplated as he is set before us in the gospel, as one mind, one heart, answering to my own in all its essential powers and affections, but purified, enlarged, exalted, so as to constitute him the unsullied image of God and a perfect model, is a being, who bears the marks of reality, whom I can understand, whom I can receive into my heart as the best of friends, with whom I can become intimate, and whose society I can and do anticipate among the chief blessings of my future being.

My friends, I have now stated, in general, what knowledge of Christ is most important, and is alone required in order to a true attachment to him. Let me still farther illustrate my views, by descending to one or two particulars. Among the various excellences of Jesus, he was distinguished by a benevolence so deep, so invincible, that injury and outrage had no power over it. His kindness towards men was in no degree diminished by their wrong-doing. The only intercession which he offered in his sufferings, was for those who at that very moment were wreaking on him their vengeance ; and, what is more remarkable, he not only prayed for them, but with an unexampled generosity and candor, urged in their behalf the only extenuation which their conduct would admit. Now, to know Jesus Christ, is to understand this attribute of his mind, to understand the strength and triumph of the benevolent principle in this severest trial, to understand the energy with which he then held fast the virtue which he had enjoined. It is to see in the mind of Jesus at that moment a moral grandeur which raised him above all around him. This is to know him. I will suppose now a man to have studied all the controversies about Christ's nature, and to have arrived at the truest notions of his rank in the universe. But this incident in Christ's history, this discovery of his character, has never impressed him ; the glory of a philanthropy which embraces one's enemies, has never dawned upon him. With all his right opinions about the unity, or the trinity, he lives, and acts towards others, very much as if Jesus had never lived or died. Now I say, that such a man does not know Christ. I say,

that he is a stranger to him. I say, that the great truth is hidden from him ; that his skill in religious controversy is of little more use to him than would be the learning by rote of a language which he does not understand. He knows the name of Christ, but the excellence which that name imports, and which gives it its chief worth, is to him as an unknown tongue.

I have referred to one view of Christ's character. I might go through his whole life. I will only observe, that in the New Testament, the crucifixion of Jesus is always set forth as the most illustrious portion of his history. The spirit of self-sacrifice, of deliberate self-immolation, of calm, patient endurance of the death of the cross, in the cause of truth, piety, virtue, human happiness, — this particular manifestation of love is always urged upon us in the New Testament, as the crowning glory of Jesus Christ. To understand this part of his character ; to understand him when he gave himself up to the shame and anguish of crucifixion ; to understand that sympathy with human misery, that love of human nature, that thirst for the recovery of the human soul, that zeal for human virtue, that energy of moral principle, that devotion to God's purposes, through which the severest suffering was chosen and borne, and into which no suffering, or scorn, or desertion, or ingratitude, could infuse the least degree of selfishness, unkindness, doubt, or infirmity, — to understand this, is to understand Jesus ; and he who wants sensibility to this, be his speculations what they may, has every thing to learn respecting the Saviour.

You will see, from the views now given, that I consider love to Christ as requiring nothing so much, as

that we fix our thoughts on the excellence of his character, study it, penetrate our minds with what was peculiar in it, and cherish profound veneration for it ; and consequently I fear, that attachment to him has been diminished by the habit of regarding other things in Christ as more important than his lovely and sublime virtues.

Christians have been prone to fix on something mysterious in his nature, or else on the dignity of his offices, as his chief claim ; and in this way his supreme glory has been obscured. His nature and offices I, of course, would not disparage ; but let them not be exalted above his Moral Worth. I maintain that this gives to his nature and offices all their claims to love and veneration, and that we understand them only as far as we see this to pervade them. This principle I would uphold against Christians of very different modes of faith.


First, there are Christians who maintain that Jesus Christ is to be loved as the Son of God, understanding by this title some mysterious connexion and identity with the Father. Far be it from me to deny, that the Divine Sonship of Jesus constitutes his true claim on our affection ; but I do deny, that the mysterious properties of this relation form any part of this claim ; for it is very clear that love to a being must rest on what we know of him, and not on unknown and unintelligible attributes. In saying that the Divine Sonship of Jesus is the great foundation of attachment to him, I say nothing inconsistent with the doctrine of this discourse, that the moral excellence of Jesus is the great object and ground of the love which is due to him.

Indeed, I only repeat the principle, that he is to be loved exclusively for the virtues of his character ; for what, I ask, is the great idea involved in his filial relation to God ? To be the Son of God, in the chief and highest sense of that term, is to bear the likeness, to possess the spirit, to be partaker of the moral perfections of God. This is the essential idea. To be God's Son is to be united with him by consent and accordance of mind. Jesus was the only begotten Son, because he was the perfect image and representative of God, especially of divine philanthropy ; because he espoused as his own the benevolent purposes of God towards the human race, and yielded himself to their accomplishment with an entire self-sacrifice. To know Jesus as the Son of God, is not to understand what theologians have written about his eternal generation, or about a mystical, incomprehensible union between Christ and his Father. It is something far higher and more instructive. It is to see in Christ, if I may say so, the lineaments of the Universal Father. It is to discern in him a godlike purity and goodness. It is to understand his harmony with the Divine Mind, and the entireness and singleness of love with which he devoted himself to the purposes of God, and the interests of the human race. Of consequence, to love Jesus as the Son of God, is to love the spotless purity and godlike charity of his soul.

There are other Christians who differ widely from those of whom I have now spoken, but who conceive that Christ's Offices, Inspiration, Miracles, are his chief claims to veneration, and who, I fear, in extolling these, have overlooked what is in-

comparably more glorious, the moral dignity of his mind, the purity and inexhaustibleness of his benevolence. It is possible, that to many who hear me, Christ seems to have been more exalted when he received from his Father supernatural light and truth, or when with superhuman energy he quelled the storm and raised the dead, than when he wept over the city which was in a few days to doom him to the most shameful and agonizing death; and yet his chief glory consisted in the spirit through which these tears were shed. Christians have yet to learn that inspiration, and miracles, and outward dignities, are nothing compared with the soul. We all need to understand better than we have done, that noble passage of Paul, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and understand all mysteries, and have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, [disinterestedness, love,] I am nothing;" and this is as true of Christ as of Paul. Indeed it is true of all beings, and yet, I fear, it is not felt as it should be by the multitude of Christians.


You tell me, my friends, that Christ's unparalleled inspiration, his perpetual reception of light from God, that this was his supreme distinction; and a great distinction undoubtedly it was: but I affirm, that Christ's inspiration, though conferred on him without measure, gives him no claim to veneration or love, any farther than it found within him a virtue, which accorded with, welcomed, and adopted it; any farther than his own heart responded to the truths he received; any farther than he sympathized with, and espoused as his own, the benevolent purposes of God, which he was



sent to announce ; any farther than the spirit of the religion which he preached was his own spirit, and was breathed from his life as well as from his lips. In other words his inspiration was made glorious through his virtues. Mere inspiration seems to me a very secondary thing. Suppose the greatest truths in the universe to be revealed supernaturally to a being who should take no interest in them; who should not see and feel their greatness, but should repeat them mechanically, as they were put into his mouth by the Deity. Such a man would be inspired, and would teach the greatest verities, and yet he would be nothing, and would have to claim to reverence.

The excellence of Jesus did not consist in his mere inspiration, but in the virtue and love which prepared him to receive it, and by which it was made effectual to the world. He did not passively hear, and mechanically repeat, certain doctrines from God, but his whole soul accorded with what he heard. Every truth which he uttered, came warm and living from his own mind ; and it was this pouring of his own soul into his instructions, which gave them much of their power. Whence came the authority and energy, the conscious dignity, the tenderness and sympathy, with which Jesus taught ? They came not from inspiration, but from the mind of him who was inspired. His personal virtues gave power to his teachings ; and without these no inspiration could have made him the source of such light and strength as he now communicates to mankind.

My friends, I have aimed to show in this discourse, that the virtue, purity, rectitude of Jesus Christ, is



his most honorable distinction, and constitutes his great claim to veneration and love. I can direct you to nothing in Christ, more important than his tried, and victorious, and perfect goodness. Others may love Christ for mysterious attributes ; I love him for the rectitude of his soul and his life. I love him for that benevolence, which went through Judea, instructing the ignorant, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind. I love him for that universal charity, which comprehended the despised publican, the hated Samaritan, the benighted heathen, and sought to bring a world to God and to happiness. I love him for that gentle, mild, forbearing spirit, which no insult, outrage, injury could overpower ; and which desired as earnestly the repentance and happiness of its foes, as the happiness of its friends. I love him for the spirit of magnanimity, constancy, and fearless rectitude, with which, amidst peril and opposition, he devoted himself to the work which God gave him to do. I love him for the wise and enlightened zeal with which he espoused the true, the spiritual interests of mankind, and through which he lived and died to redeem them from every sin, to frame them after his own godlike virtue. I love him, I have said, for his moral excellence ; I know nothing else to love. I know nothing so glorious in the Creator or his creatures. This is the greatest gift which God bestows, the greatest to be derived from his Son.

You see why I call you to cherish the love of Christ. This love I do not recommend as a luxury of feeling, as an ecstasy bringing immediate and overflowing joy. I view it in a nobler light. I call you to love Jesus, that you may bring yourselves into contact and com-

munion with perfect virtue, and may become what you love. I know no sincere, enduring good but the moral excellence which shines forth in Jesus Christ. Your wealth, your outward comforts and distinctions, are poor, mean, contemptible, compared with this ; and to prefer them to this is self-debasement, self-destruction. May this great truth penetrate our souls ; and may we bear witness in our common lives, and especially in trial, in sore temptation, that nothing is so dear to us as the virtue of Christ.

DISCOURSE XI.

EPHESIANS vi. 24.

GRACE BE WITH ALL THEM THAT LOVE OUR LORD JESUS
CHRIST IN SINCERITY.

In the preceding discourse, I considered the nature and ground of love to Christ. The subject is far from being exhausted. I propose now, after a few remarks on the importance and happiness of this attachment, to call your attention to some errors in relation to it, which prevail in the Christian world.

A virtuous attachment purifies the heart. In loving the excellent, we receive strength to follow them. It is happy for us when a pure affection springs up within us, when friendship knits us with holy and generous minds. It is happy for us when a being of noble sentiments and beneficent life enters our circle, becomes an object of interest to us, and by affectionate intercourse takes a strong hold on our hearts. Not a few can trace the purity and elevation of their minds to connexion with an individual, who has won them by the beauty of his character to the love and practice of righteousness. These views show us the ser-

vice which Jesus Christ has done to mankind, simply in offering himself before them as an object of attachment and affection. In inspiring love, he is a benefactor. A man brought to see and feel the godlike virtues of Jesus Christ, who understands his character and is attracted and won by it, has gained, in this sentiment, immense aid in his conflict with evil and in his pursuit of perfection. And he has not only gained aid, but happiness ; for a true love is in itself a noble enjoyment. It is the proper delight of a rational and moral being, leaving no bitterness or shame behind, not enervating like the world's pleasures, but giving energy and a lofty consciousness to the mind.

Our nature was framed for virtuous attachments. How strong and interesting are the affections of domestic life, the conjugal, parental, filial ties. But the heart is not confined to our homes, or even to this world. There are more sacred attachments than these, in which instinct has no part, which have their origin in our highest faculties, which are less tumultuous and impassioned than the affections of nature, but more enduring, more capable of growth, more peaceful, far happier, and far nobler. Such is love to Jesus Christ, the most purifying, and the happiest attachment, next to the love of our Creator, which we can form. I wish to aid you in cherishing this sentiment, and for this end I have thought, that in the present discourse it would be well to point out some wrong views, which I think have obstructed it, and obscured its glory.

I apprehend, that, among those Christians who bear the name of Rational, from the importance which

they give to the exercise of reason in religion, love to Christ has lost something of its honor, in consequence of its perversion. It has too often been substituted for practical religion. Not a few have professed a very fervent attachment to Jesus, and have placed great confidence in this feeling, who, at the same time, have seemed to think little of his precepts, and have even spoken of them as unimportant compared with certain doctrines about his person or nature. Gross errors of this kind have led, as it seems to me, to the opposite extreme. They have particularly encouraged among calm and sober people the idea, that the great object of Christ was to give a religion, to teach great and everlasting truth, and that our concern is with his religion rather than with himself. The great question, as such people say, is, not what Jesus *was*, but what he *revealed*. In this way a distinction has been made between Jesus and his religion; and, whilst some sects have done little but talk of Christ and his person, others have dwelt on the principles he taught, to the neglect, in a measure, of the Divine Teacher. I consider this as an error, to which some of us may be exposed, and which therefore deserves consideration.

Now, I grant, that Jesus Christ came to give a religion, to reveal truth. This is his great office; but I maintain, that this is no reason for overlooking Jesus; for his religion has an intimate and peculiar connexion with himself. It derives authority and illustration from his character. Jesus is his religion embodied, and made visible. The connexion between him and his system is peculiar. It differs altogether from that

which ancient philosophers bore to their teachings. An ancient sage wrote a book, and the book is of equal value to us, whether we know its author or not. But there is no such thing as Christianity without Christ. We cannot know it separately from him. It is not a book which Jesus wrote. It is his conversation, his character, his history, his life, his death, his resurrection. He pervades it throughout. In loving him, we love his religion ; and a just interest in this cannot be awakened, but by contemplating it as it shone forth in himself.


Christ's religion, I have said, is very imperfect without himself; and therefore they who would make an abstract of his precepts, and say that it is enough to follow these without thinking of their author, grievously mistake, and rob the system of much of its energy. I mean not to disparage the precepts of Christ, considered in themselves. But their full power is only to be understood and felt, by those who place themselves near the Divine Teacher, who see the celestial fervor of his affection whilst he utters them, who follow his steps from Bethlehem to Calvary, and witness the expression of his precepts in his own life. These come to me almost as new precepts, when I associate them with Jesus. His command to love my enemies, becomes intelligible and bright, when I stand by his cross and hear his prayer for his murderers. I understand what he meant by the self-denial which he taught, when I see him foregoing the comforts of life, and laying down life itself, for the good of others. I learn the true character of that benevolence, by which human nature is perfected, how it unites calmness and

earnestness, tenderness and courage, condescension and dignity, feeling and action; this I learn in the life of Jesus as no words could teach me. So I am instructed in the nature of piety by the same model. The command to love God with all my heart, if only written, might have led me into extravagance, enthusiasm, and neglect of common duties; for religious excitement has a peculiar tendency to excess: but in Jesus I see a devotion to God, entire, perfect, never remitted, yet without the least appearance of passion, as calm and self-possessed as the love which a good mind bears to a parent; and in him I am taught, as words could not teach, how to join supreme regard to my Creator, with active charity and common duties towards my fellow beings.

And not only the precepts, but the great doctrines of Christianity, are bound up with Jesus, and cannot be truly understood without him. For example, one of the great doctrines of Christianity, perhaps its chief, is the kind interest of God in all his creatures, not only in the good but in the evil; his placable, clement, merciful character; his desire to recover and purify and make for ever happy even those who have stained themselves with the blackest guilt. The true character of God in this respect I see indeed in his providence, I read it in his word, and for every manifestation of it I am grateful. But when I see his spotless and beloved Son, to whom his power was peculiarly delegated, and in whom he peculiarly dwelt, giving singular attention to the most fallen and despised men, casting away all outward pomp that he might mingle familiarly with the poor and neglected; when

I see him sitting at table with the publican and the sinner, inviting them to approach him as a friend, suffering the woman, whose touch was deemed pollution, to bedew his feet with tears ; and when I hear him in the midst of such a concourse saying, “ I am come to seek and to save that which was lost,” — I have a conviction of the lenity, benignity, grace of that God, whose representative and chosen minister he was, such as no abstract teaching could have given me. Let me add one more doctrine, that of immortality. I prize every evidence of this great truth ; I look within and without me, for some pledge, that I am not to perish in the grave, that this mind, with its thoughts and affections, is to live, and improve, and be perfected, and to find that joy for which it thirsts and which it cannot find on earth. Christ’s teaching on this subject is invaluable ; but what power does this teaching gain, when I stand by his sepulchre, and see the stone rolled away, and behold the great revealer of immortality, rising in power and triumph, and ascending to the life and happiness he had promised !

Thus Christianity, from beginning to end, is intimately connected with its Divine Teacher. It is not an abstract system. The rational Christian who would think of it as such, who, in dwelling on the religion, overlooks its Revealer, is unjust to it. Would he see and feel its power, let him see it warm, living, breathing, acting in the mind, heart, and life of its Founder. Let him love it there. In other words, let him love the character of Jesus, justly viewed, and he will love the religion in the way most fitted to make it the power of God unto salvation.



I have said that love to Christ, when he is justly viewed, that is, when it is an enlightened and rational affection, includes the love of his whole religion ; but I beg you to remember that I give this praise only to an enlightened affection ; and such is not the most common, nor is it easily acquired. I apprehend that there is no sentiment, which needs greater care in its culture than this. Perhaps, in the present state of the world, no virtue is of more difficult acquisition than a pure and intelligent love towards Jesus. There is undoubtedly much of fervent feeling towards him in the Christian world. But let me speak plainly. I do it from no uncharitableness. I do it only to warn my fellow Christians. The greater part of this affection to Jesus seems to me of very doubtful worth. In many cases, it is an irregular fervor, which impairs the force and soundness of the mind, and which is substituted for obedience to his precepts, for the virtues which ennoble the soul. Much of what is called love to Christ I certainly do not desire you or myself to possess. I know of no sentiment which needs more to be cleared from error and abuse, and I therefore feel myself bound to show you some of its corruptions.


In the first place, I am persuaded that a love to Christ of quite a low character is often awakened by an injudicious use of his sufferings. I apprehend, that if the affection which many bear to Jesus were analyzed, the chief ingredient in it would be found to be a tenderness awakened by his cross. In certain classes of Christians, it is common for the religious teacher to delineate the bleeding, dying Saviour, and to

detail his agonies, until men's natural sympathy is awakened ; and when assured that this deep woe was borne for themselves, they almost necessarily yield to the softer feelings of their nature. I mean not to find fault with this sensibility. It is happy for us that we are made to be touched by others' pains. Woe to him, who has no tears for mortal agony. But in this emotion there is no virtue, no moral worth ; and we dishonor Jesus, when this is the chief tribute we offer him. I say there is no moral goodness in this feeling. To be affected, overpowered by a crucifixion, is the most natural thing in the world. Who of us, let me ask, whether religious or not, ever went into a Catholic church, and there saw the picture of Jesus hanging from his cross, his head bending under the weight of exhausting suffering, his hands and feet pierced with nails, and his body stained with his open wounds, and has not been touched by the sight ? Suppose that, at this moment, there were lifted up among us a human form, transfixed with a spear, and from which the warm lifeblood was dropping in the midst of us. Who would not be deeply moved ? and when a preacher, gifted with something of an actor's power, places the cross, as it were, in the midst of a people, is it wonderful that they are softened and subdued ? I mean not to censure all appeals of this kind to the human heart. There is something interesting and encouraging in the tear of compassion. There was wisdom in the conduct of the Moravian Missionaries in Greenland, who, finding that the rugged and barbarous natives were utterly insensible to general truth, depicted, with all possible vividness, the streaming

blood and dying agonies of Jesus, and thus caught the attention of the savage through his sympathies, whom they could not interest through his reason or his fears. But sensibility, thus awakened, is quite a different thing from true, virtuous love to Jesus Christ ; and, when viewed and cherished as such, it takes the place of higher affections. I have often been struck by the contrast between the use made of the cross in the pulpit, and the calm, unimpassioned manner in which the sufferings of Jesus are detailed by the Evangelists. These witnesses of Christ's last moments, give you in simple language the particulars of that scene, without one remark, one word of emotion ; and if you read the Acts and Epistles, you will not find a single instance, in which the Apostles strove to make a moving picture of his crucifixion. No ; they honored Jesus too much, they felt too deeply the greatness of his character, to be moved as many are by the circumstances of his death. Reverence, admiration, sympathy with his sublime spirit, these swallowed up, in a great measure, sympathy with his sufferings. The cross was to them the last, crowning manifestation of a celestial mind ; they felt that it was endured to communicate the same mind to them and the world ; and their emotion was a holy joy in this consummate and unconquerable goodness. To be touched by suffering is a light thing. It is not the greatness of Christ's sufferings on the cross which is to move our whole souls, but the greatness of the spirit with which he suffered. There, in death, he proved his entire consecration of himself to the cause of God and mankind. There his love flowed forth towards

his friends, his enemies, and the human race. It is moral greatness, it is victorious love, it is the energy of principle, which gives such interest to the cross of Christ. We are to look through the darkness which hung over him, through his wounds and pains, to his unbroken, disinterested, confiding spirit. To approach the cross for the purpose of weeping over a bleeding, dying friend, is to lose the chief influence of the crucifixion. We are to visit the cross, not to indulge a natural softness, but to acquire firmness of spirit, to fortify our minds for hardship and suffering in the cause of duty and of human happiness. To live as Christ lived, to die as Christ died, to give up ourselves as sacrifices to God, to conscience, to whatever good interest we can advance, — these are the lessons written with the blood of Jesus. His cross is to inspire us with a calm courage, resolution, and superiority to all temptation. I fear (is my fear groundless?) that a sympathy which enervates rather than fortifies, is the impression too often received from the crucifixion. The depression with which the Lord's table is too often approached, and too often left, shows, I apprehend, that the chief use of his sufferings is little understood, and that he is loved, not as a glorious sufferer who died to spread his own sublime spirit, but as a man of sorrows, a friend bowed down with the weight of grief.

In the second place, love to Christ of a very defective kind is cherished, in many, by the views which they are accustomed to take of themselves. They form irrational ideas of their own guilt, supposing it to have its origin in their very creation, and then represent to their imaginations an abyss of fire and torment,



over which they hang, into which the anger of God is about to precipitate them, and from which nothing but Jesus can rescue them. Not a few, I apprehend, ascribe to Jesus Christ a greater compassion towards them than God is supposed to feel. His heart is tenderer than that of the Universal Parent, and this tenderness is seen in his plucking them by a mighty power from tremendous and infinite pain, from everlasting burnings. Now that Jesus, under such circumstances should excite the mind strongly, should become the object of a very intense attachment, is almost necessary; but the affection so excited is of very little worth. Let the universe seem to me wrapt in darkness, let God's throne send forth no light but blasting flashes, let Jesus be the only bright and cheering object to my affrighted and desolate soul, and a tumultuous gratitude will carry me towards him just as irresistibly as natural instinct carries the parent animal to its young. I do and must grieve at the modes commonly used to make Jesus Christ an interesting being. Even the Infinite Father is stripped of his glory for the sake of throwing a lustre round the Son. The condition of man is painted in frightful colors which cast unspeakable dishonor on his Creator, for the sake of magnifying the greatness of Christ's salvation. Man is stripped of all the powers which make him a responsible being, his soul harrowed with terrors, and the future illumined only by the flames which are to consume him, that his deliverer may seem more necessary; and when the mind, in this state of agitation, in this absence of self-control, is wrought up into a fervor of gratitude to Jesus, it is

thought to be sanctified. This selfish, irrational gratitude is called a virtue. Much of the love, given to Jesus, having the origin of which I now speak, seems to me of no moral worth. It is not the soul's free gift, not a sentiment nourished by our own care from a conviction of its purity and nobleness, but an instinctive, ungoverned, selfish feeling. Suppose, my friends, that in a tempestuous night you should find yourselves floating towards a cataract, the roar of which should announce the destruction awaiting you, and that a fellow being, of great energy, should rush through the darkness, and bring you to the shore; could you help embracing him with gratitude? And would this emotion imply any change of character? Would you not feel it towards your deliverer, even should he have acted from mere impulse, and should his general character be grossly defective? Is not this a necessary working of nature, a fruit of terror changed into joy? I mean not to condemn it; I only say it is not virtue. It is a poor tribute to Jesus; he deserves something far purer and nobler.

The habit of exaggerating the wretchedness of man's condition for the purpose of rendering Jesus more necessary, operates very seriously to degrade men's love to Jesus, by accustoming them to ascribe to him a low and common-place character. I wish this to be weighed. They who represent to themselves the whole human race as sinking by an hereditary corruption into an abyss of flame and perpetual woe, very naturally think of Jesus as a being of overflowing compassion, as impelled by a resistless pity to fly

to the relief of these hopeless victims ; for this is the emotion that such a sight is fitted to produce. Now this overpowering compassion, called forth by the view of exquisite misery, is a very ordinary virtue ; and yet, I apprehend, it is the character ascribed above all others to Jesus. It certainly argues no extraordinary goodness, for it is an almost necessary impulse of nature. Were you, my friends, to see millions and millions of the human race on the edge of a fiery gulf, where ages after ages of torture awaited them, and were the shrieks of millions who had already been plunged into the abyss to pierce your ear, — could you refrain from an overpowering compassion, and would you not willingly endure hours and days of exquisite pain to give these wretched millions release ? Is there any man who has not virtue enough for this ? I have known men of ordinary character hazard their lives under the impulse of compassion, for the rescue of fellow-beings from infinitely lighter evils than are here supposed. To me it seems, that to paint the misery of human beings in these colors of fire and blood, and to ascribe to Christ the compassion which such misery must awaken, and to make this the chief attribute of his mind, is the very method to take from his character its greatness, and to weaken his claim on our love. I see nothing in Jesus of the overpowering compassion which is often ascribed to him. His character rarely exhibited strong emotion. It was distinguished by calmness, firmness, and conscious dignity. Jesus had a mind too elevated to be absorbed and borne away by pity or any other passion. He felt indeed deeply for human suffering and grief ; but his

chief sympathy was with the Mind, with its sins and moral diseases, and especially with its capacity of improvement and everlasting greatness and glory? He felt himself commissioned to quicken and exalt immortal beings. The thought which kindled and sustained him, was that of an immeasurable virtue to be conferred on the mind, even of the most depraved; a good, the very conception of which implies a lofty character, a good, which as yet has only dawned on his most improved disciples. It is his consecration to this sublime end, which constitutes his glory; and no farther than we understand this, can we yield him the love which his character claims and deserves.

I have endeavoured to show the circumstances which have contributed to depress and degrade men's affections towards Jesus Christ. To me the influence of these causes seems to be great. I know of no feeling more suspicious than the common love to Christ. A true affection to him, indeed, is far from being of easy acquisition. As it is the purest and noblest we can cherish, with the single exception of love to God, so it requires the exercise of our best powers. You all must feel, that an indispensable requisite or preparation for this love is to understand the character of Jesus. But this is no easy thing. It not only demands that we carefully read and study his history; there is another process more important. We must begin in earnest to convert into practice our present imperfect knowledge of Christ, and to form ourselves upon him as far as he is now discerned. Nothing so much brightens and strengthens the eye of the mind to understand an excellent being, as likeness to him. We never

know a great character until something congenial to it has grown up within ourselves. No strength of intellect and no study can enable a man of a selfish and sensual mind to comprehend Jesus. Such a mind is covered with a mist ; and just in proportion as it subdues evil within itself, the mist will be scattered, Jesus will rise upon it with a sunlike brightness, and will call forth its most fervent and most enlightened affection.


I close with two remarks. You see, by this discourse, how important to the love of Christ it is, to understand with some clearness the purpose for which he came into the world. The low views prevalent on this subject seem to me to exert a disastrous influence on the whole character, and particularly on our feelings towards Christ. Christ is supposed to have come to rescue us from an outward hell, to bear the penalties of an outward law. Such benevolence would indeed be worthy of praise ; but it is an inferior form of benevolence. The glory of Christ's character, its peculiar brightness, seems to me to consist in his having given himself to accomplish an inward, moral, spiritual deliverance of mankind. He was alive to the worth and greatness of the human soul. He looked through what men were, looked through the thick shades of their idolatry, superstition, and vice, and saw in every human being a spirit of divine origin and godlike faculties, which might be recovered from all its evil, which might become an image and a temple of God. The greatness of Jesus consisted in his devoting himself to call forth a mighty power in the

human breast, to kindle in us a celestial flame, to breathe into us an inexhaustible hope, and to lay within us the foundation of an immovable peace. His greatness consists in the greatness and sublimity of the action, which he communicates to the human soul. This is his chief glory. To avert pain and punishment is a subordinate work. Through neglect of these truths, I apprehend that the brightness of Christ's character is even now much obscured, and perhaps least discerned by some who think they understand him best.

My second remark is, that, if the leading views of this discourse be just, then love to Jesus Christ depends very little on our conception of his rank in the scale of being. On no other topic have Christians contended so earnestly, and yet it is of secondary importance. To know Jesus Christ, is not to know the precise place he occupies in the universe. It is something more ; it is to look into his mind ; to approach his soul ; to comprehend his spirit ; to see how he thought, and felt, and purposed, and loved ; to understand the workings of that pure and celestial principle within him, through which he came among us as our friend, and lived and died for us. I am persuaded that controversies about Christ's person have in one way done great injury. They have turned attention from his character. Suppose, that, as Americans, we should employ ourselves in debating the questions, where Washington was born, and from what spot he came when he appeared at the head of our armies ; and that, in the fervor of these contentions, we should overlook the character of his mind, the spirit that moved within him, the virtues which dis-

tinguished him, the beamings of a noble, magnanimous soul, — how unprofitably should we be employed. Who is it that understands Washington? Is it he, that can settle his rank in the creation, his early history, his present condition? or he, to whom the soul of that great man is laid open, who comprehends and sympathizes with his generous purposes, who understands the energy with which he espoused the cause of freedom and his country, and who receives through admiration a portion of the same divine energy? So in regard to Jesus, the questions which have been agitated about his rank and nature are of inferior moment. His greatness belonged not to his condition, but to his mind, his spirit, his aim, his disinterestedness, his calm, sublime consecration of himself to the high purpose of God.

My hearers, it is the most interesting event in human history, that such a being as Jesus has entered our world, to accomplish the deliverance of our minds from all evil, to bring them to God, to open heaven within them, and thus to fit them for heaven. It is our greatest privilege that he is brought within our view, offered to our imitation, to our trust, to our love. A sincere and enlightened attachment to him is at once our honor and our happiness, a spring of virtuous action, of firmness in suffering, of immortal hope. But remember, it will not grow up of itself. You must resolve upon it, and cherish it. You must bring Jesus near, as he lives and moves in the gospel. You should meet him in the institution, which he especially appointed for the commemoration of himself. You should seek, by prayer, God's aid in strengthening



your love to the Saviour. You should learn his greatness and beneficence by learning the greatness and destination of the souls which he came to rescue and bless. In the last place, you should obey his precepts, and through this obedience should purify and invigorate your minds to know and love him more. "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

NOTE ON THE FIRST THREE SERMONS.

It was my intention to add one if not more sermons on the text, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ"; but as they would have nearly filled the volume, it was thought best that they should give place to others on different topics. I have not however sought a great variety in my subjects. My principal aim has been to bring out and enforce a few great truths; and I hope to give hereafter my views of other important principles.

Some of my remarks may be thought to have an unfavorable bearing on Judaism; but I generally refer to Judaism as existing in the time of Christ. This religion, as given by Moses and especially as expounded by the Prophets, had a spiritual element, which redeems it from the reproach of being solely or prevalently an outward, ceremonial service; and when we consider that it was given to prepare the way for a revelation which was to enlighten and save the world, we shall see, that under the appearance of a narrow, local system, it had a vast and generous purpose, worthy of its Divine Author.

In discussing the genuineness of the four Gospels, I was compelled by my limits to give the evidence in its most general form. I refer my reader for the details to Paley's chapter on the same subject. That admirable writer has there compressed the most important parts of Lardner's great work.

For the same reason, I could only give a few general remarks on the contrast between the Christian miracles and those of false religions. This subject is treated at large in Douglas's "Criterion," a book full of instruction and interest.

I cannot refer to any work devoted to the evidence arising from the character of Christ, though it has been ably discussed in many discourses. I am told, that a book recently translated from the German, and published among us, entitled "The Plan of Jesus," by Reinhard, is a valuable accession to the Christian evidences.

It was my desire in this note to enlarge on some topics, on which I may not have given my views with sufficient explicitness; but my want of health disables me for such an effort. This cause has delayed the publication of the volume, and I ought to add, that it has prevented me from bestowing on several of the discourses the care which I wished and hoped to give. I intended to condense the two last discourses into one; but my strength was unequal to the task, nor could I even make the slighter changes which are almost always needed in compositions prepared for the pulpit without a thought of publication.

W. E. C.

THE END.







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